

Running head: RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

The Challenges of Recruitment and Retention for the Suffolk Department of Fire and Rescue

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CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

Signed: _____

Abstract

This descriptive research project utilized surveys to investigate the Suffolk Department of Fire and Rescue's (SDFR) problem of recruiting and retaining quality employees. This research compared SDFR's compensation package with those of surrounding jurisdictions. It was predicted that SDFR would rank low in a comparison of compensation packages among area fire services. Survey results demonstrated parity among starting salaries for comparable employees; however, a salary disparity between SDFR's officers and their local counterparts was evident. Furthermore, survey results indicated that salary and advancement opportunity are factors in employee resignations. Recommendations for increasing SDFR's competitiveness in attracting and retaining employees include restructuring and re-aligning ranks and pay grades; conducting a comprehensive benefits study; defining all employment positions; and surveying current employees to ascertain their level of job satisfaction.

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The Challenges of Recruitment and Retention for the Suffolk Department of Fire and Rescue

Introduction

Suffolk Department of Fire and Rescue (SDFR) has had a total of 34 employees resign over the past 15 years. This is over 17% of SDFR's workforce. Of those 34 who resigned, some did so due to a career change. Most, however, left for another position of equal rank in another municipality or government. Suffolk City Council and its administration recognized that employee retention was a problem for succession planning and retaining quality employees to ensure the continued success of the City of Suffolk. Therefore, in May 2004, Suffolk City Council adopted the 2004-2005 operating budget that included funds for a Public Safety Compensation and Staffing Study. The City Manager directed a third party consultant to conduct the study to prevent any possible bias, while Fire Chief Outlaw received approval to conduct a separate study of the entire Hampton Roads Fire & Rescue community (M. R. Outlaw, personal communication, September 2004). This separate study would provide research to augment the independent research conducted by the contracted agency that compared each of Tidewater's Fire & Rescue agencies: Chesapeake, Hampton, Norfolk, Newport News, Portsmouth, Suffolk and Virginia Beach (M. R. Outlaw, personal communication, September 2004).

This research examined the SDFR's problem of recruiting and retaining a quality workforce. The purpose of this descriptive research is to compare SDFR's compensation package with those of the surrounding local jurisdictions to provide recommendations for creating a more competitive salary structure that will attract and retain a quality workforce. The research will include two different surveys. The first survey will sample local jurisdictions to identify the ranks within each organization and the salary structure for each rank for comparison as SDFR's referent others. The second survey and related interviews will sample former

employees to determine reasons for resignation and incentives for returning to the SDFR. This research will answer the following questions:

- How does SDFR's compensation package compare to local jurisdictions with which it competes in hiring and retaining quality employees?
- How does the existing compression problem result in supervisors earning less than their subordinates?
- What aspect of the compensation package has the most impact upon an employee's decision to leave SDFR?
- What other benefits should SDFR compare with other jurisdictions and improve upon to attract and retain employees?

Resolving these questions will enable the SDFR to meet one of the initiatives set forth by the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation Life Safety Summit in Florida, 2004.

Recommendations resulting from this study will facilitate developing and implementing national standards for training, qualifications, and certifications in order to build a succession plan based on hiring and retaining quality employees. The training should be equally applicable to all firefighters and based on the duties they are expected to perform. (National Fallen Firefighter Foundation [NFFF], 2004) This will ensure continuity within the department when attracting and retaining personnel.

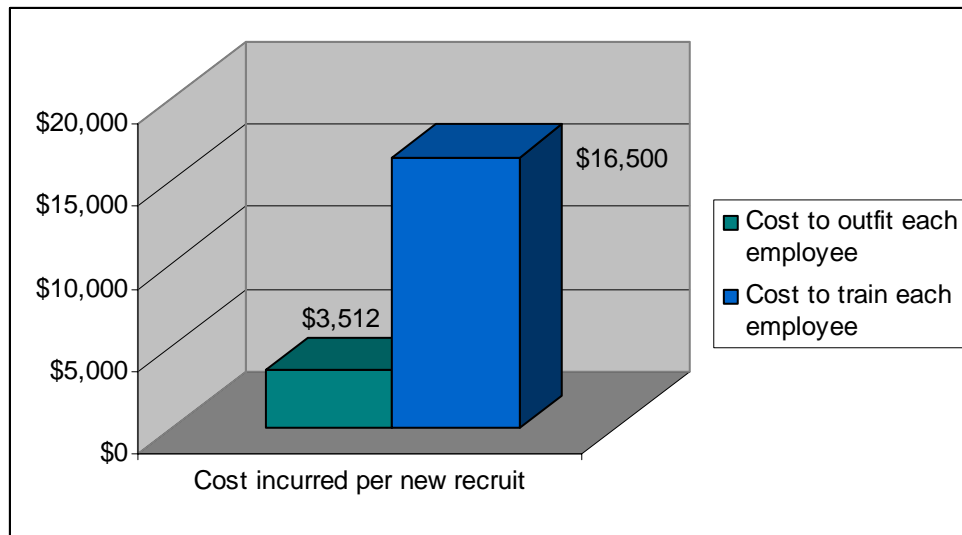
Background & Significance

SDFR has experienced a 17% reduction of skilled firefighters due to career changes and employees leaving to accept positions of equal rank in neighboring jurisdictions. This workforce reduction does not include an additional 17% due to retirement. This amounts to 34% of the SDFR workforce having to be replaced with lesser trained personnel. Unfortunately, the SDFR

has experienced a common trend of losing employees to neighboring departments after having invested time and resources in their training to fully qualify them for their position (Smith, 2002). Organizations that lose employees to a similar position in other jurisdictions should view such movements as a warning sign (Smith, 2002). This issue is directly linked to the United States Fire Administration's fifth operational objective, in which the USFA will respond to emergent issues (United States Fire Administration [USFA], 2004). SDFR has a problem with retaining employees due to its compensation structure, a result, according to *Fire Chief* magazine, of SDFR not having been properly trained in how to establish a fair compensation package (Smith, 2002). It is evident that the USFA does not currently offer training to help departments with such issues. The USFA does however, offer training for new leadership within any department, but not in areas of recruitment or retention, which is a challenge for SDFR. This has lead to a growing void between ranks because of a lack of succession in training employees.

In 2003 during an episode of CBS's Marketwatch, emergency responders were listed as one of the ten most underpaid employees in the United States (Bledsoe, 2004). Consequently, if an organization's compensation system is viewed as inadequate, top applicants may reject offers of employment, and current employees may choose to leave the organization in favor of higher paying positions elsewhere (Gale Group, Inc. [GGI], 2000). When a vacancy requires filling, agencies bear a series of costs: psychological impact, staffing coverage, testing and review, etc. The costs for SDFR include training and outfitting each firefighter. The cost to outfit a new recruit is approximately \$3,512 (W. Edwards, personal communication, May 9, 2006). This is in addition to approximately \$16,500 to train them (D. Huffman, personal communication, May 8, 2006).

When an employee leaves the SDFR, the only recoverable costs are in personal protective equipment, approximately \$3,107. Personal uniform items are not recoverable at a cost of approximately \$405 per person (W. Edwards, personal communication, May 9, 2006). The difficulty that has emerged for agencies in the recruitment and retention of key, trained personnel clearly is affecting the bottom line and creating stress for those still on the job (Sinkler, 2001).



The problem of recruiting and retaining quality employees has a significant impact upon Succession Planning. Succession planning is an organized and systematic way to ensure employees are willing to succeed to strategic roles within the organization and it is predicated upon retention (United States Fire Administration [USFA], 2000). The secrets to attracting and retaining talented employees are simple: pay them fairly and treat them well (Straughn, 2005). Compensation not only provides a means of sustenance and allows people to satisfy their materialistic and recreational needs, it also serves their ego or self-esteem needs (GGI, 2000).

Literature Review

Pay and benefits are extremely important to both new and existing employees. The compensation received from work is a major reason most people seek employment (Gale Group, Inc. [GGI], 2000). Brown, Dawson, and Levine believe good pay and benefits are ranked by some first responders as one of the most important aspects of their jobs (Brown, Dawson, & Levine, 2003). The Gale Group also says that because compensation practices heavily influence recruitment, morale, and turnover, it is important that applicants and employees view these practices in a favorable light (GGI, 2000). This research examined a salary survey to verify this assumption.

Fire departments overseas also struggle with the issue of fair compensation as their American counterparts. As in the United States, Europe recognized that the role of a firefighter has changed from that of a manual laborer (Duncan, 2002). Instead, firefighting is taking on a more hybrid role of both blue and white-collar worker. In addition to being labor intensive, fire service also draws heavily on the employee having a solid background in higher-education.

The Gale Group notes that a salary survey can provide information on pay rates offered by competitors for certain ranks. Companies may hire consulting firms to gather such information (GGI, 2000). Moreover, according to *Fire Chief* magazine, many public safety agencies are not well-versed in how to set salaries and benefits at the right level (Smith, 2002). The Suffolk City Manager acknowledged this when an outside agency was contracted to research this issue and conduct the salary survey. This would limit the chance of any bias that could be present if city employees had been conducting the study (M. R. Outlaw, personal communication, September 2004). However, this would not prevent SDFR from conducting a

separate study with valid and impartial results. The intent would be to either mirror the results of the consultant's study or to point out the deficiencies it might have.

While the *Canadian Emergency News* reminds readers that money does not buy worker happiness, not paying what is at least perceived to be a fair wage is going to create a difficult environment, no matter what other positive employer incentives are provided (Browett, 2004). In addition, disgruntled employees choosing to remain with an organization may begin to behave unproductively, and become less motivated, helpful, or cooperative if an organization's compensation system is viewed as inadequate (GGI, 2000). Research findings have linked underpayment to increases in absenteeism and turnover and to decreases in the amount of effort exerted on the job (GGI, 2000). These linkages are especially strong among individuals earning, or who believe they are earning, low salaries and feel underpaid (GGI, 2000).

People make several comparisons when they assess the fairness of their pay. Perceived fairness is achieved only when all comparisons are viewed as equitable. When employees' outcome-to-input ratios (O/I) are less than that of their referent others, they feel they are being underpaid; when greater, they feel they are being overpaid. Both conditions produce feelings of tension which employees will attempt to reduce in one of the following ways (GGI, 2000):

1. Decrease their inputs by reducing their effort or performance.
2. Attempt to increase their outcomes by seeking a raise or salary.
3. Distort their perceptions of their inputs and/or outcomes by convincing themselves that their O/I ratio is already equal to that of their referent other.
4. Attempt to change the inputs and/or outcomes of their referent others by trying to convince their referent other to increase outputs by working harder for their pay.
5. Choose a new referent other whose O/I ratio is already equal to theirs.

6. Escape the situation. This response may be manifested by a variety of behaviors, such as absenteeism, tardiness, excessive work-breaks, or quitting.

If pay rates are set too low, the organization is likely to experience recruitment and turnover problems. If set too high, however, the organization is likely to experience budget problems which may ultimately lead to higher prices, pay freezes, layoffs, etc (GGI, 2000). When compensation-related costs escalate, the organization must find a way to offset them. In the past, companies passed higher compensation costs along to the customer in the form of higher process costs (GGI, 2000). As a not-for-profit organization, SDFR does not have this option. Instead, SDFR's budget is supplied by a tax base. Unless the citizen is willing to accept higher taxes, the issue becomes politically driven.

The Gale Group has concluded that employees will believe their pay is equitable when they perceive that it is fair relative to the pay coworkers in the same organization receive (internal consistency); it is fair relative to the pay received by workers in other organizations who hold similar positions (external competitiveness); and fairly reflects their input to the organization (employees contributions) (GGI, 2000). Overpaid individuals do not respond negatively, if at all, because they feel little, if any tension, and thus have no need to reduce it (GGI, 2000).

A positive effect of maintaining happy employees is better, faster service for customers. Unhappy employees have little chance to produce satisfied customers, so the more content your employees are, the higher your customer satisfaction will be (Straughn, 2005).

Procedures

The City of Suffolk's Administration identified that public safety officers' pay grades needed to be separated from the city's general employees. To begin the process of separating the pay grades, a study needed to be conducted to compare City of Suffolk public safety officer employees' compensation packages with surrounding jurisdictions. City of Suffolk's Department of Fire and Rescue Fire Chief M. R. Outlaw required that his department conduct this survey to augment the study to be conducted by the consultant hired at the City Council's request (M. R. Outlaw, personal communication, September 2004). Thus, the Chief had this researcher conduct both an internal and external study of this department's employee compensation packages.

The sample population for the external study consisted of fire department Chiefs who administer departments with close proximity to the SDFR. This sample was chosen based on their competition with the SDFR in the recruitment and retention of employees. There were a total of six departments in the survey sample for the external study.

The Chief of each department received the survey package by mail with letters from both the SDFR Chief and the author asking for assistance with the study. See Appendix A for an example of the survey package. If the Chief of a department did not complete the survey, he designated a contact person for the surveyor to call for the requested data. Data was to be recovered from employee payroll records and personnel files obtained from Human Resources, Personnel, and Finance Departments as in the internal study. Surveys were expected to be completed and returned within a 30-day period, or the author would then contact the department's designated responder. This communication would ensure that the survey materials

had arrived at the expected destination and provide an opportunity to discuss what problems, if any, the point of contact had been experiencing while collecting the requested information.

Internal study

The first part of the compensation study consisted of examining the current employees of SDFR including all ranks and tenure. Contact was made with the SDFR's Human Resources representative who had access to every employee's salary and tenure. Each employee's salary was entered a spreadsheet with his/her years of service in his/her current rank. See Appendix A, pg. 59 for an example of the spreadsheet. For example all the first year firefighters' salaries were compared; all the five year lieutenants' salaries were compared, and so on. Then each rank was compared with each subsequent rank. This comparison indicated cases in which subordinates were being paid more than their supervisor because of tenure, better known as "compression". In compression, salaries for different ranks are overlapping. This could potentially drive down morale and create less incentive for those seeking promotion.

External study

The next part of the compensation study included an external study of those local jurisdictions that SDFR competed with for quality employees. A ten-question survey was designed to collect background information on the target department; determine number of employees, rank structure and job description, promotion process, salary structure, evaluation process, annual raises, contact information; and to ascertain whether the department had conducted a similar pay study recently. Also attached to the questionnaire was an empty spreadsheet template that allowed the reviewer to add the rank and salary for each employee for different incremental years of service. See Appendix A for a partial example of the package sent to the Fire Chiefs of the surrounding localities. As a professional courtesy and a guideline of

what was expected, a breakdown of SDFR employees' rank and salary structure was also provided to them.

Former employees studied

A final study of SDFR's former employees was conducted to verify the opinions of those who left SDFR jobs for similar positions and different careers that the city's compensation package was less than adequate. The study included either a survey or interview. Those who had a current address on file with SDFR were sent surveys. Those who had to be tracked down were given telephone interviews to quickly gain accurate information. The data gathered in both research procedures included length of tenure with SDFR, current salary and rank (if it was in the same job field), was current employment with the employer they left SDFR for the contributing factors for leaving employment with SDFR, and the contributing factors for returning. The data gathered from these surveys would provide an accurate list of factors in employee resignation.

Assumptions and Limitations

This research assumed that the salaries of Suffolk's public safety officers are inadequate and a key factor in recruitment and retention of a quality workforce. Furthermore, the research assumed that salary alone, rather than the whole compensation package, is the determining factor in whether an employee resigns from SDFR.

The most important limitation to the research was the size of the sample population for both surveys. Only six local fire departments were surveyed in the first part of the study. Five out of the six localities responded. One department chose not to participate.

In addition, 14 out of 19 former employees were able to be surveyed because of lack of current contact information; of the 14 surveyed, only 6 responded. Due to the limited response

of former employees, some data regarding their service with SDFR was gathered through second and third-hand sources.

Definition of Terms

Referent other – People compare themselves to others doing the same job within the same organization, in the same organization but performing different jobs, and doing the same job in other organizations (GGI, 2000).

Comparable worth – one employee's value to their employer compared to another one with equal responsibility to the same employer or another employer.

Results

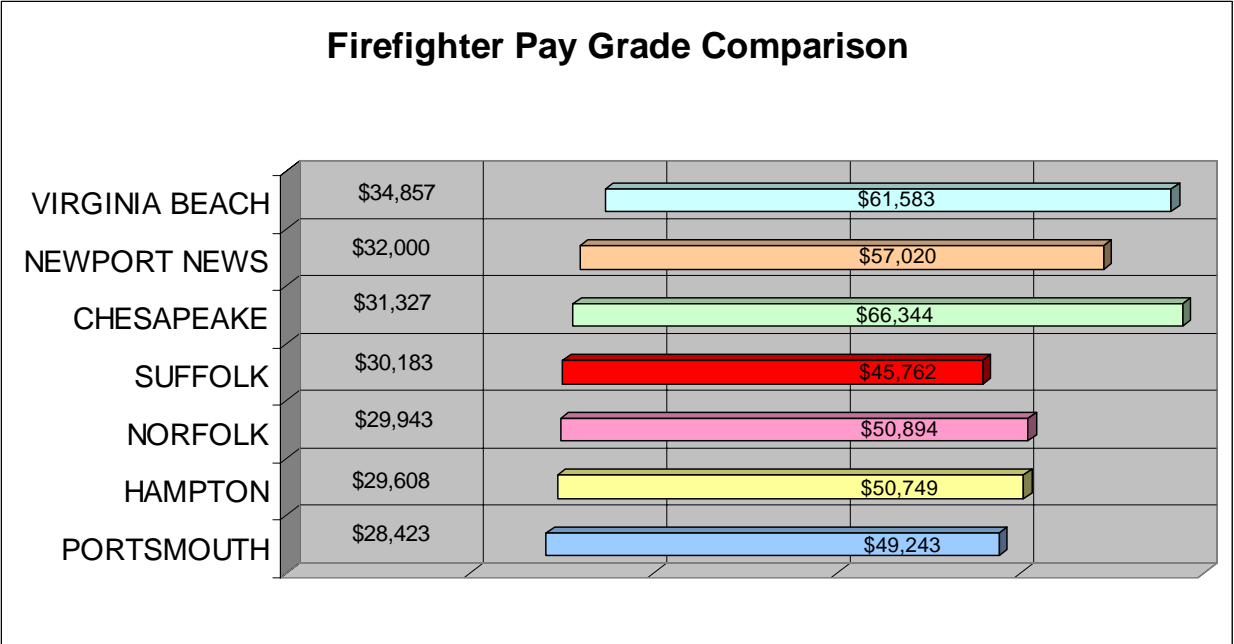
The results of the surveys and interviews indicate that SDFR pays its employees, particularly its firefighters, a mediocre starting salary. Consequently, there is little incentive to stay with SDFR for the length of a career. The SDFR has become a stepping-stone into the larger public safety arena that offers better compensation for longevity and promotion. SDFR Firefighters get paid as average salary compared to other jurisdictions, however the pay range tops out at a lower cap. Therefore the medium salary is less, resulting in the other jurisdictions' firefighters quickly catching and exceeding SDFR firefighters in earning power. For officers such as a Lieutenant and Captain in the SDFR, there is even less of an incentive to stay because their salary is poor compensation compared to that of their referent other in another jurisdiction. Like their subordinate ranks, line officers suffer low pay ranges that result in their pay raises being slowly overtaken by the salaries of other jurisdictions' line officers. For those ranks beyond Captain who are ineligible for overtime, their salary is not only lower than their referent other in another jurisdiction, but their subordinates' compensation exceeds their own because of overtime earnings. Even with hypothetically higher pay raises than their referent others in

another jurisdiction; pay salaries are slow to progress unless SDFR's pay raise is significantly higher.

Results were compiled based on the responses for each question on the survey and then expressed as a comparison against the total sample population. The following charts show each rank and how they compare to other jurisdictions both actually and hypothetically to answer the first research question:

- How does SDFR's compensation package compare to local jurisdictions with which it competes in hiring and retaining quality employees?

All jurisdictions but the city of Portsmouth responded to the survey used to collect the research data. Instead, all of Portsmouth's data was pulled from a previous analysis conducted by The Management Advisory Group for Newport News (Management Advisory Group, Inc. [MAGI], 2004). The following graphs show each rank and the pay grade, with minimum and maximum salary structure. SDFR's starting salary for a firefighter represents the median among all the other localities.

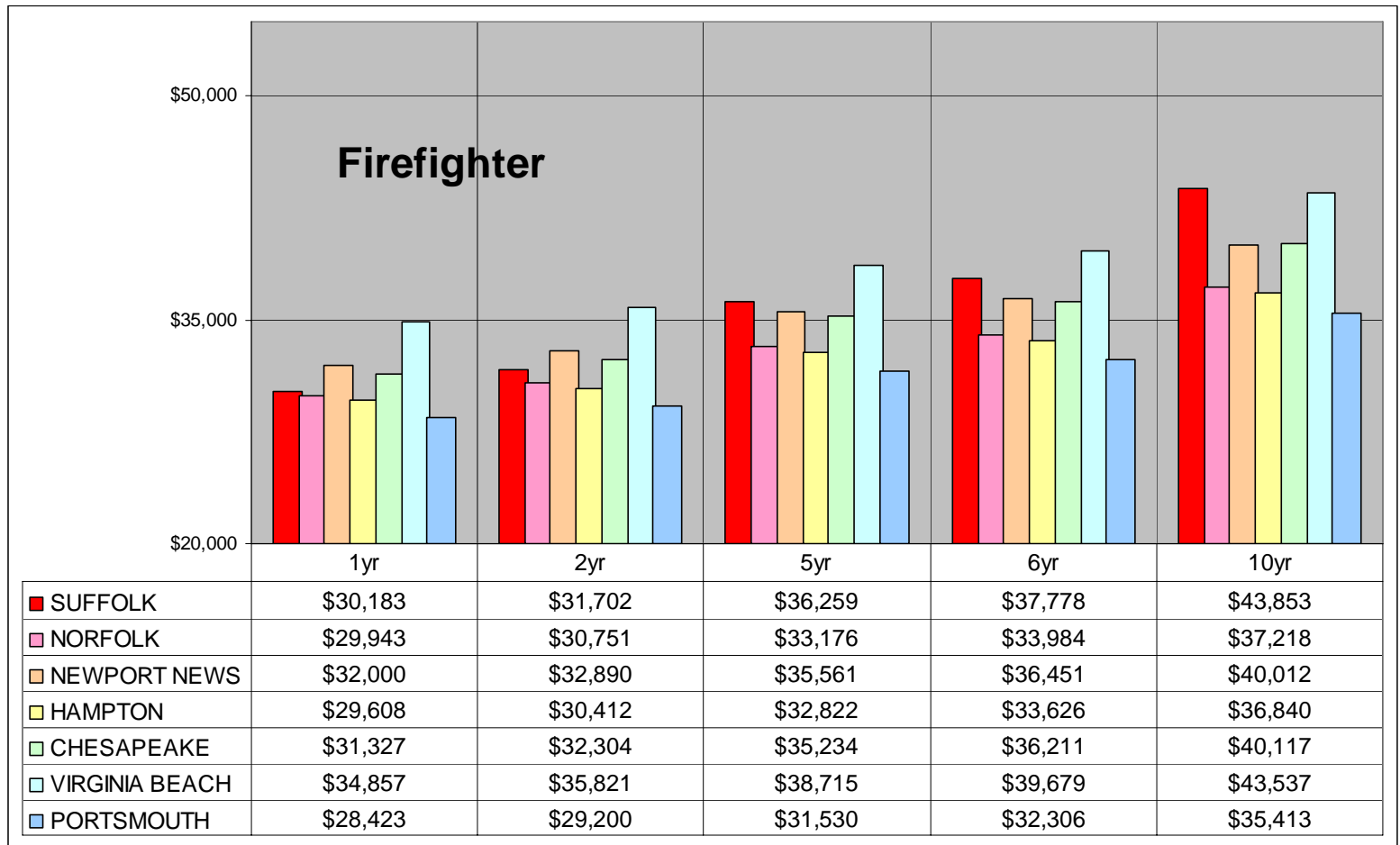


This graph compares starting salaries and maximum earnings for fire and rescue employees of the Hampton Roads jurisdictions.

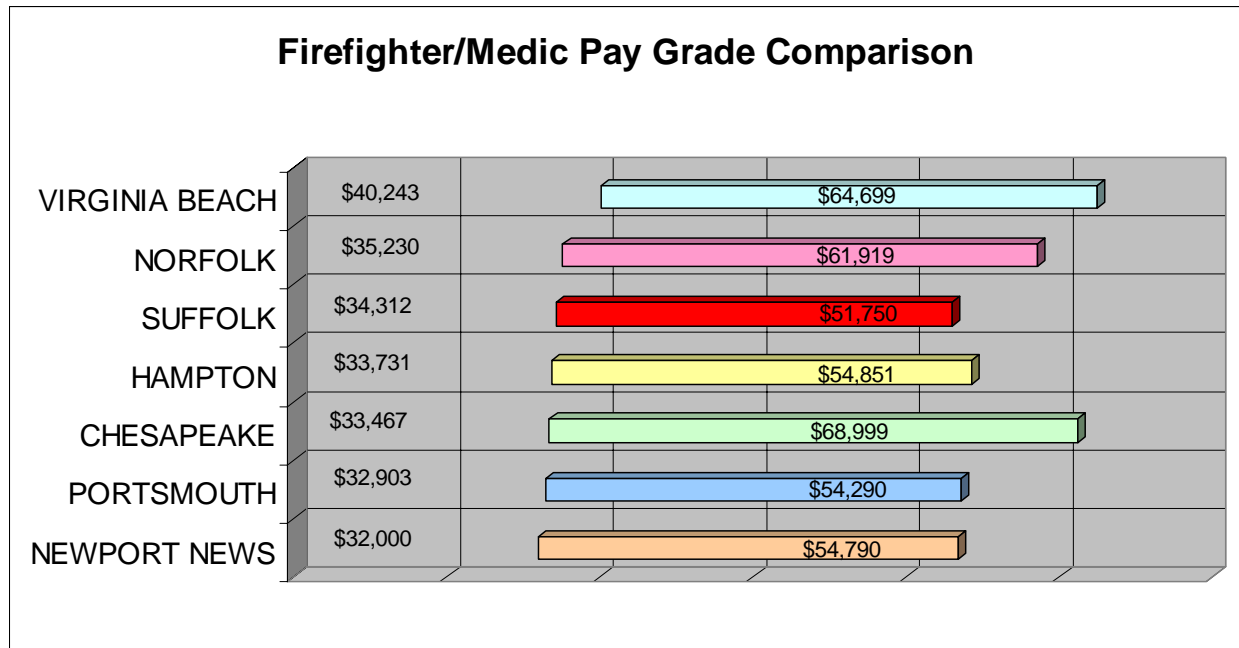
Firefighters in Norfolk, Hampton, and Portsmouth already earn less than SDFR

firefighters. However, all other city firefighters have a higher Midpoint and Maximum Salary in the firefighter rankings. Therefore, if all the cities got the same pay raise percentage, firefighters in other cities would gradually earn more each year than SDFR firefighters.

Hypothetically, if the City of Suffolk gave its employees a 4% raise and all the other localities only gave a 2% raise, it will take a SDFR Firefighter six years to match the salary of a Firefighter in Newport News and Chesapeake. It would be ten years before that same Firefighter could match the salary of a Virginia Beach Firefighter (see graph below).

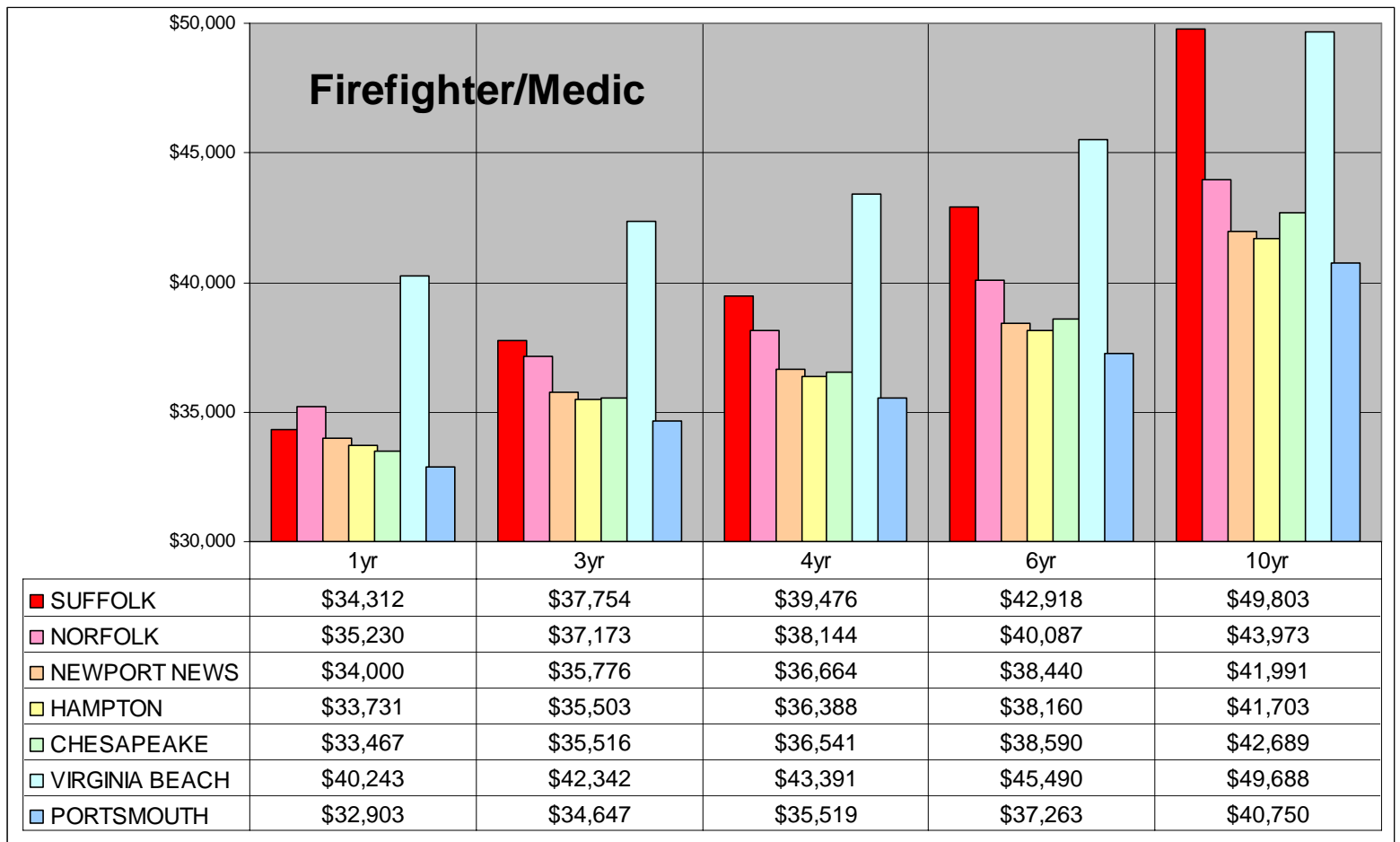


SDFR firefighter/medics are some of the highest paid medics compared to other municipalities' medics. However, like the firefighter rankings, firefighter/medics have the lowest maximum salary, and consequently, the lowest midpoint salary that in turn drives down the annual rate of salary increase.

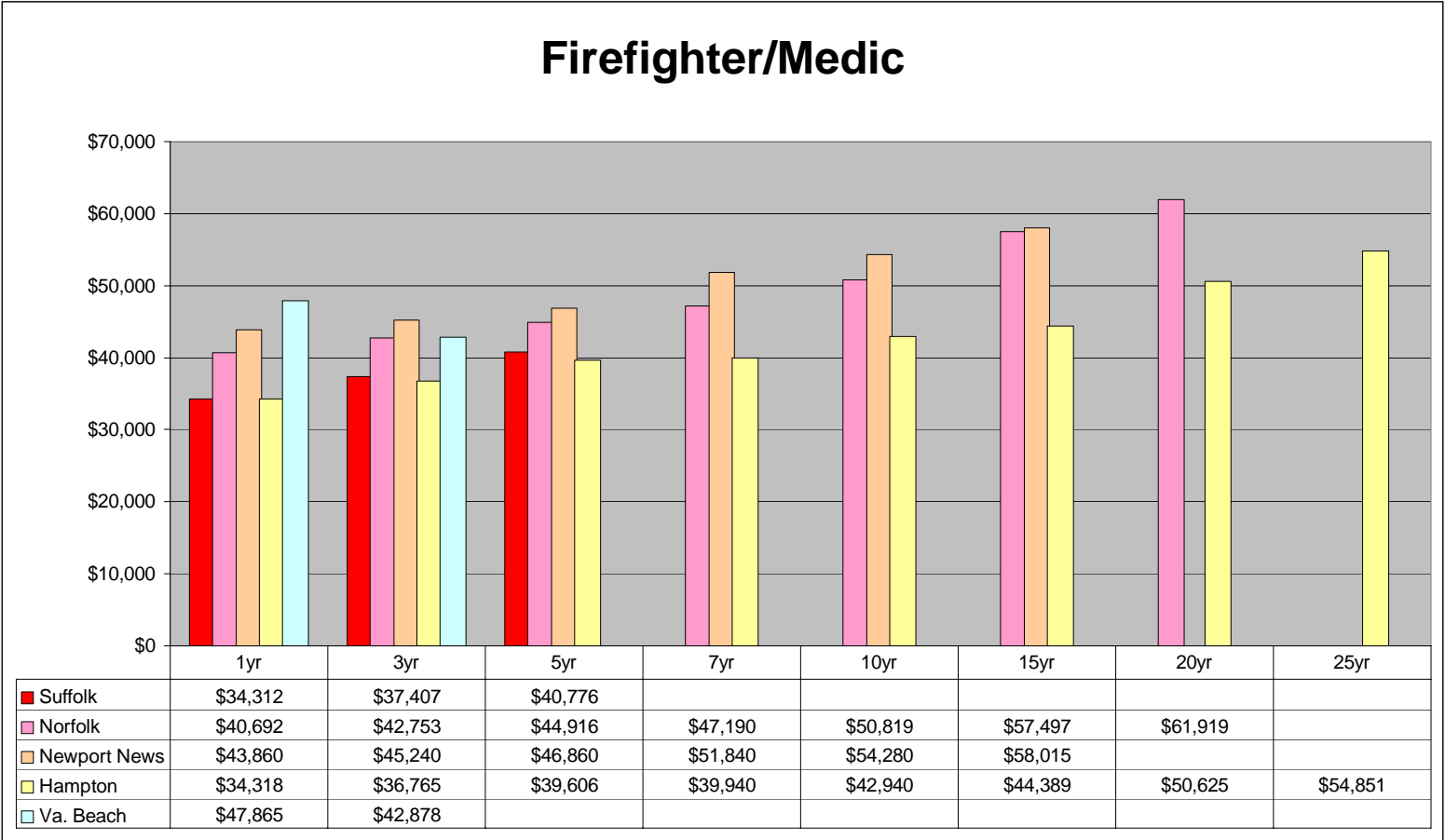


Firefighter/Medics in Newport News, Hampton, Chesapeake, and Portsmouth already make less than Suffolk Firefighter/Medics. However, all other city firefighter/medics have a higher Maximum Salary and Midpoint salary in the firefighter rankings (see graph above). Therefore, if all the cities got the same pay raise percentage, firefighters in other cities would gradually be earning more each year than SDFR firefighters, eventually surpassing them.

Hypothetically, if the City of Suffolk gave its employees a 4% raise and all the other localities only gave a 2% raise, it will take a firefighter/medic in SDFR three years to match the earnings of a firefighter/medic in Norfolk. It will be ten years before that same firefighter/medic can match the earnings of a Virginia Beach firefighter/medic (see graph below). The following graph shows how long it will take for a firefighter/medic in Suffolk to catch up to all the other firefighter/medics in Tidewater.

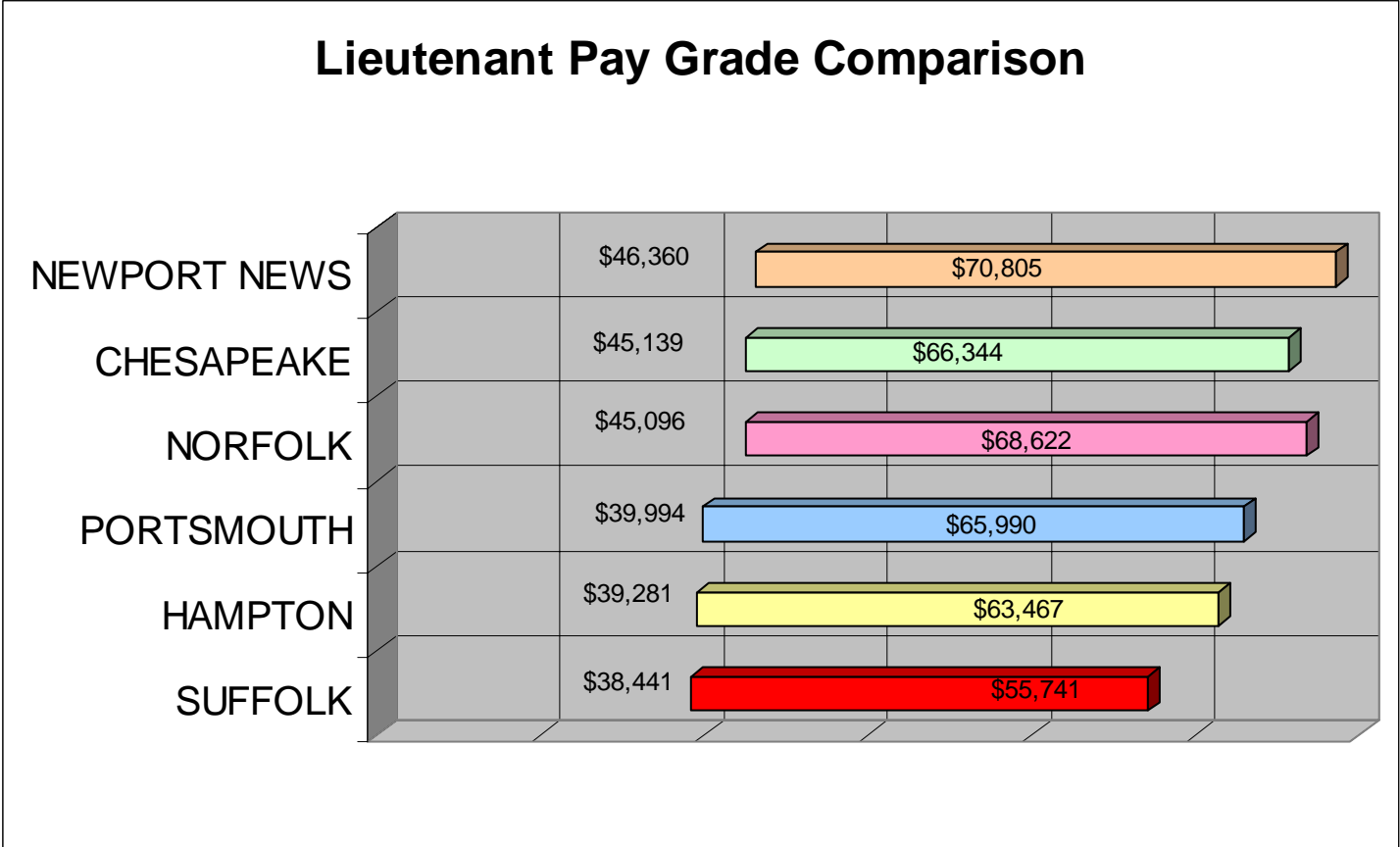


The graph below shows how much a firefighter/medic makes per city with the same number of years in rank. It compares SDFR firefighter/medics to their referent others in another jurisdiction.



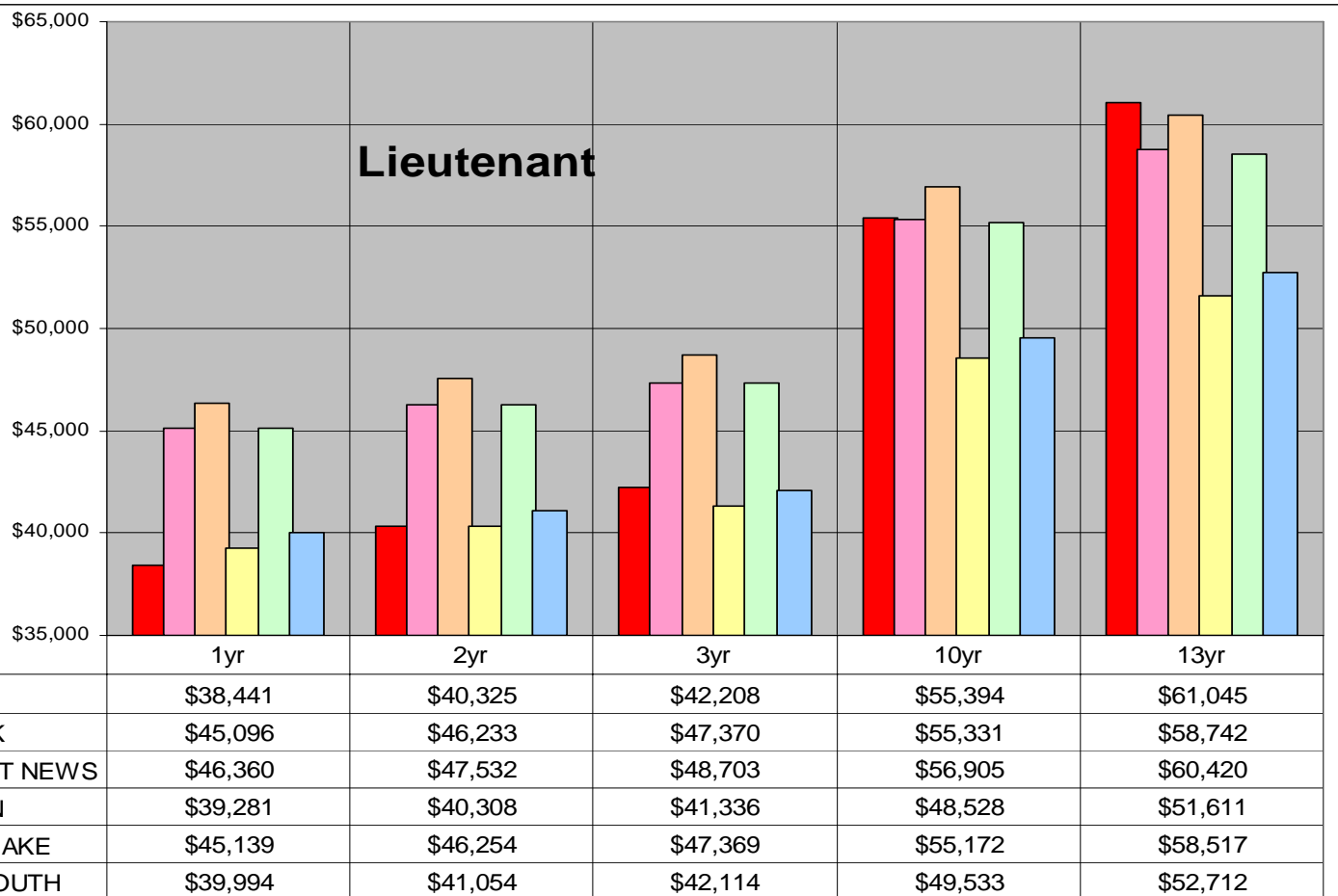
SDFR’s compensation disparity is most evident in the officer ranks (see graph below).

SDFR is the lowest paying municipality with regard to compensating their lieutenants, the first-line supervisors as evidenced below.

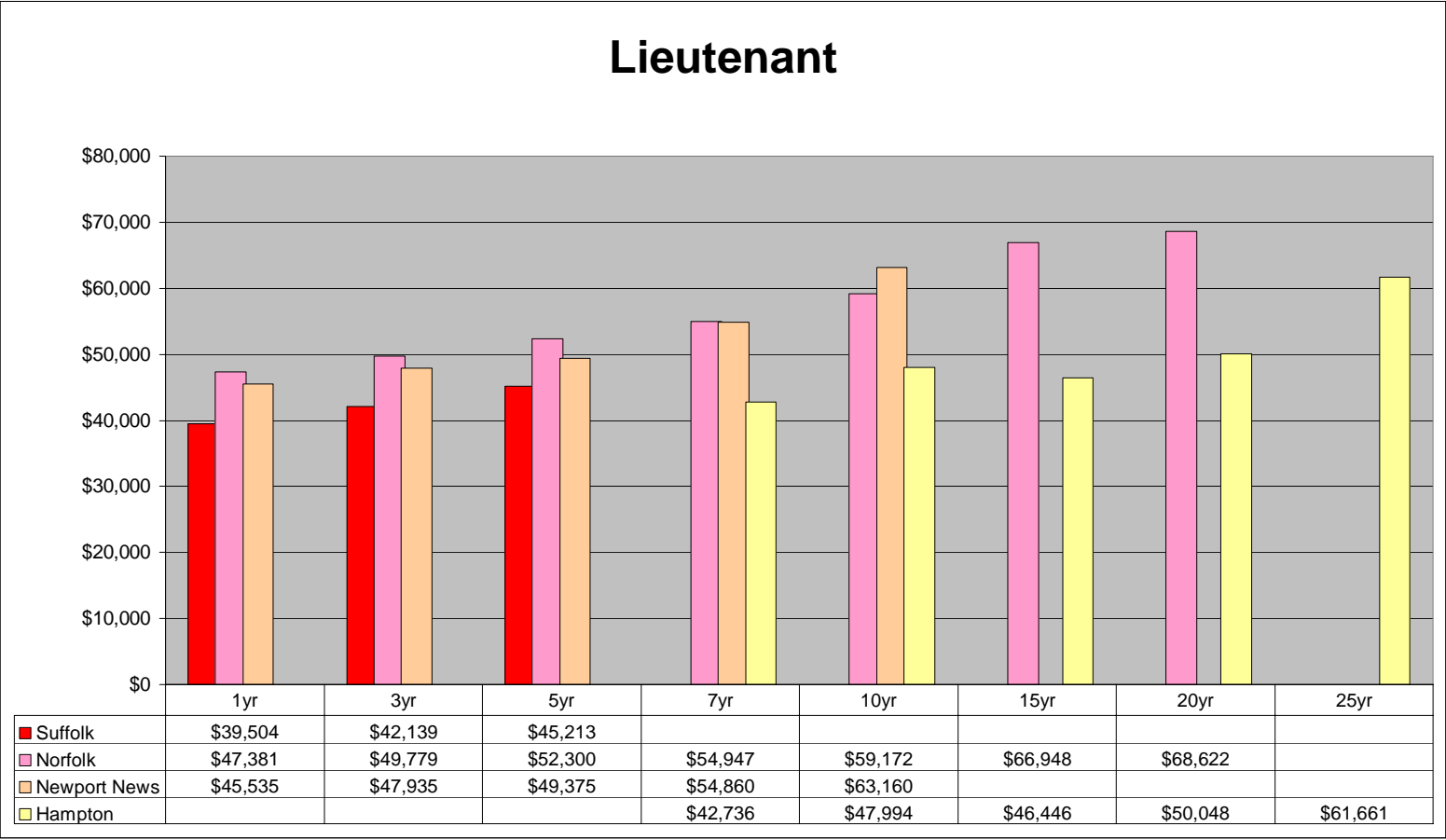


If all the other cities continue to give the same pay-raise to their lieutenants, they would continue to earn more than SDFR’s lieutenants each year, thus steadily increasing the salary gap between referent others.

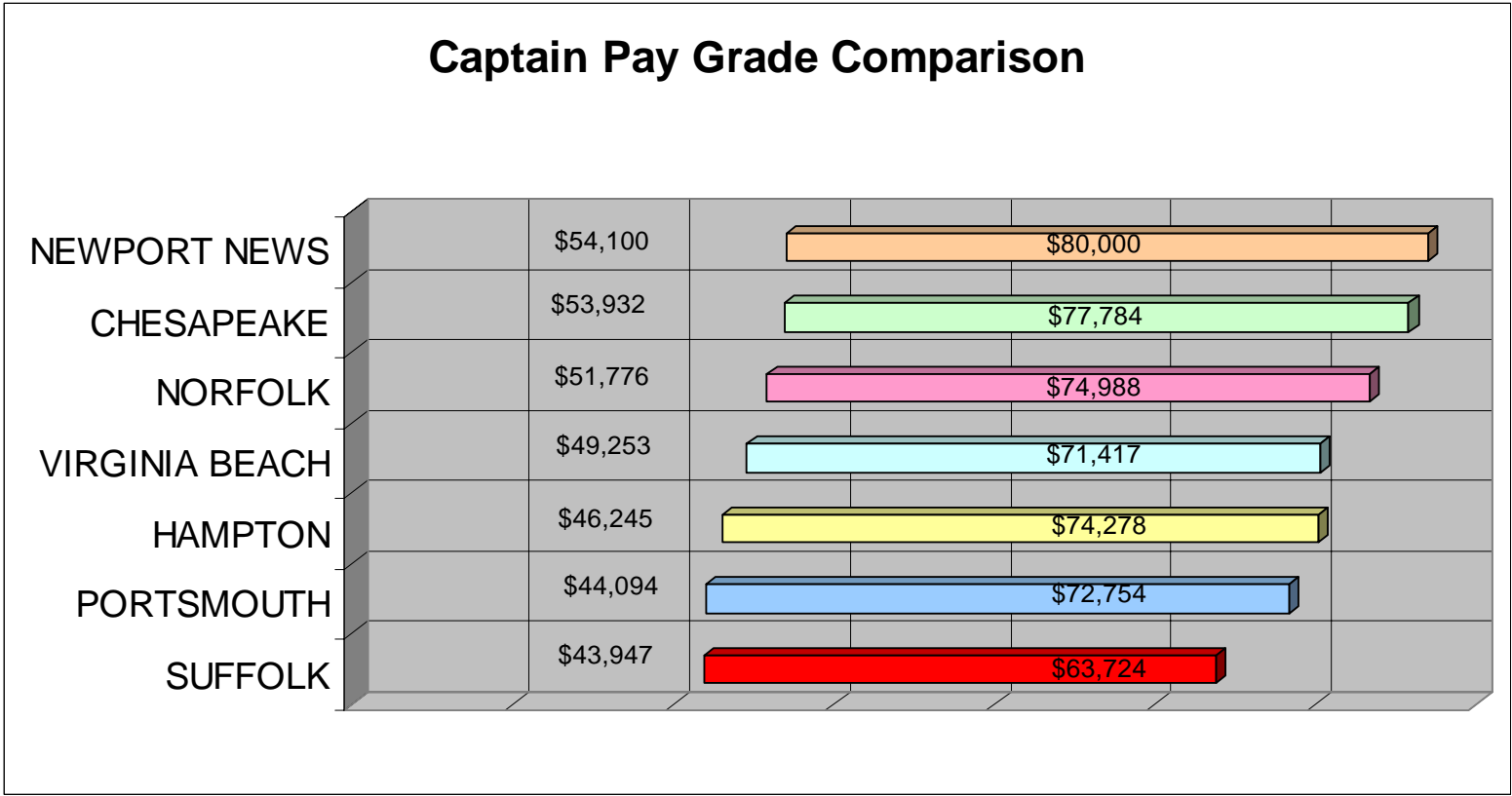
Hypothetically, if the City of Suffolk gave its employees a 4% raise and all the other localities only gave a 2% raise, it will take a lieutenant two years to match the earning of a lieutenant in Hampton, three years to match the earnings of a Portsmouth lieutenant, and ten years to match the earning of a Norfolk lieutenant. Before a Suffolk lieutenant can to match the earning of a Lieutenant in Newport News or Chesapeake, they would top out at the maximum salary in their pay grade. The graph below shows how long it will take for a lieutenant in Suffolk to match the earning of all the other lieutenants in Tidewater.



The graph below shows how much a Lieutenant earns per city with the same number of years in rank. It compares SDFR lieutenants to their referent others in another jurisdiction.

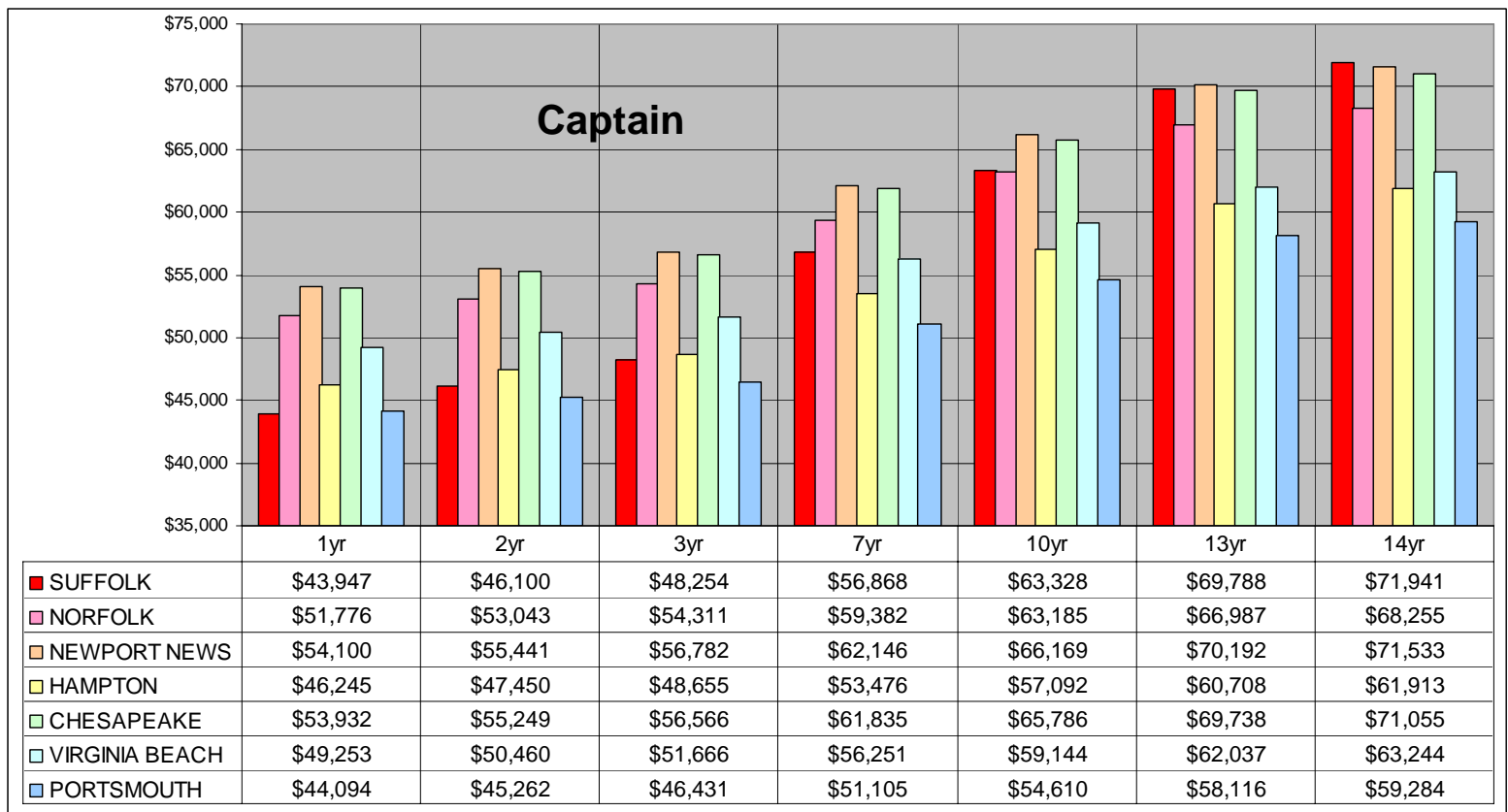


The graph below illustrates the disparity between the salaries of ranking captains. SDFR is the lowest paying municipality for captains.

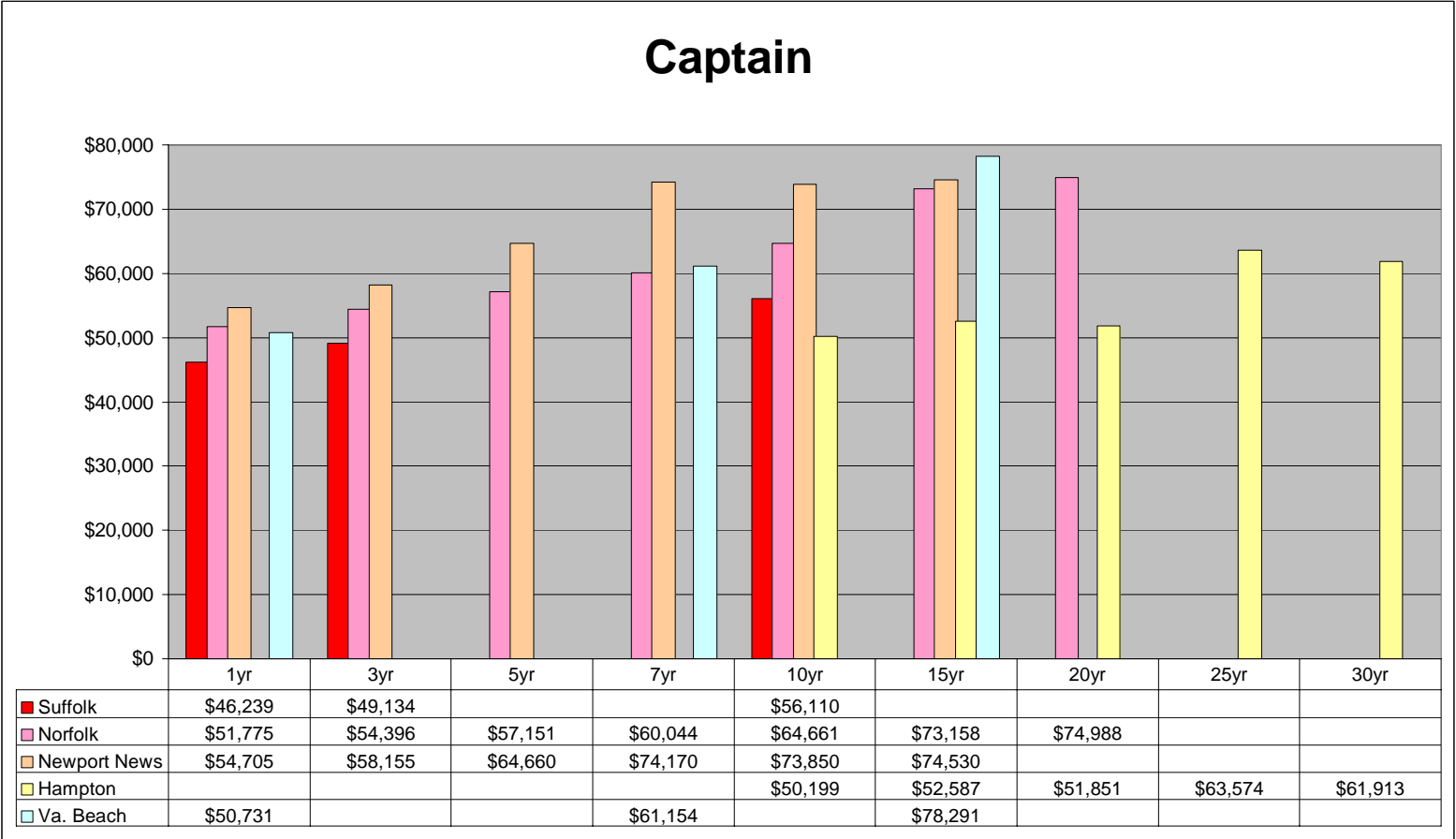


If all the other cities continue to give the same pay-raise to their captains, they would continue to earn more each year, thus steadily increasing the salary gap between referent others.

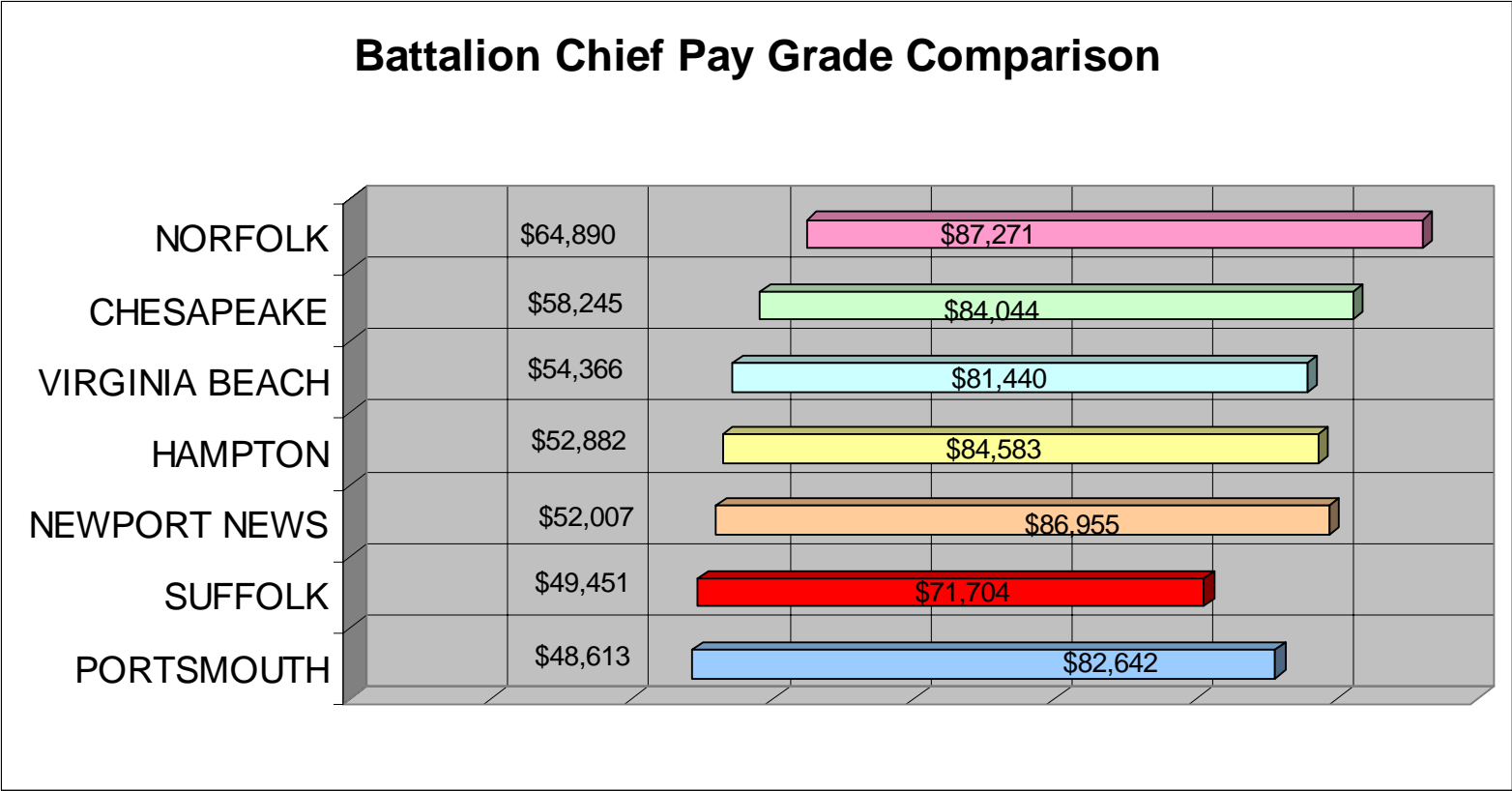
Hypothetically, if the City of Suffolk gave its employees a 4% raise and all the other localities only gave a 2% raise, it will take a SDFR captain two years to match the earnings of a captain in Portsmouth, three years to match the earnings of a Hampton captain, seven years to match the earnings of a Virginia Beach captain, and ten years to match the earnings of a Norfolk captain. Before a Suffolk captain could match the earnings of a captain in Newport News or Chesapeake, they would top out at the maximum salary for their pay grade. The graph below shows how long it will take for a captain in Suffolk to match the earnings of all the other captains in Tidewater.



The graph below shows how much a captain earns per city with the same number of years in rank. It compares SDFR captains to their referent others in another jurisdiction.

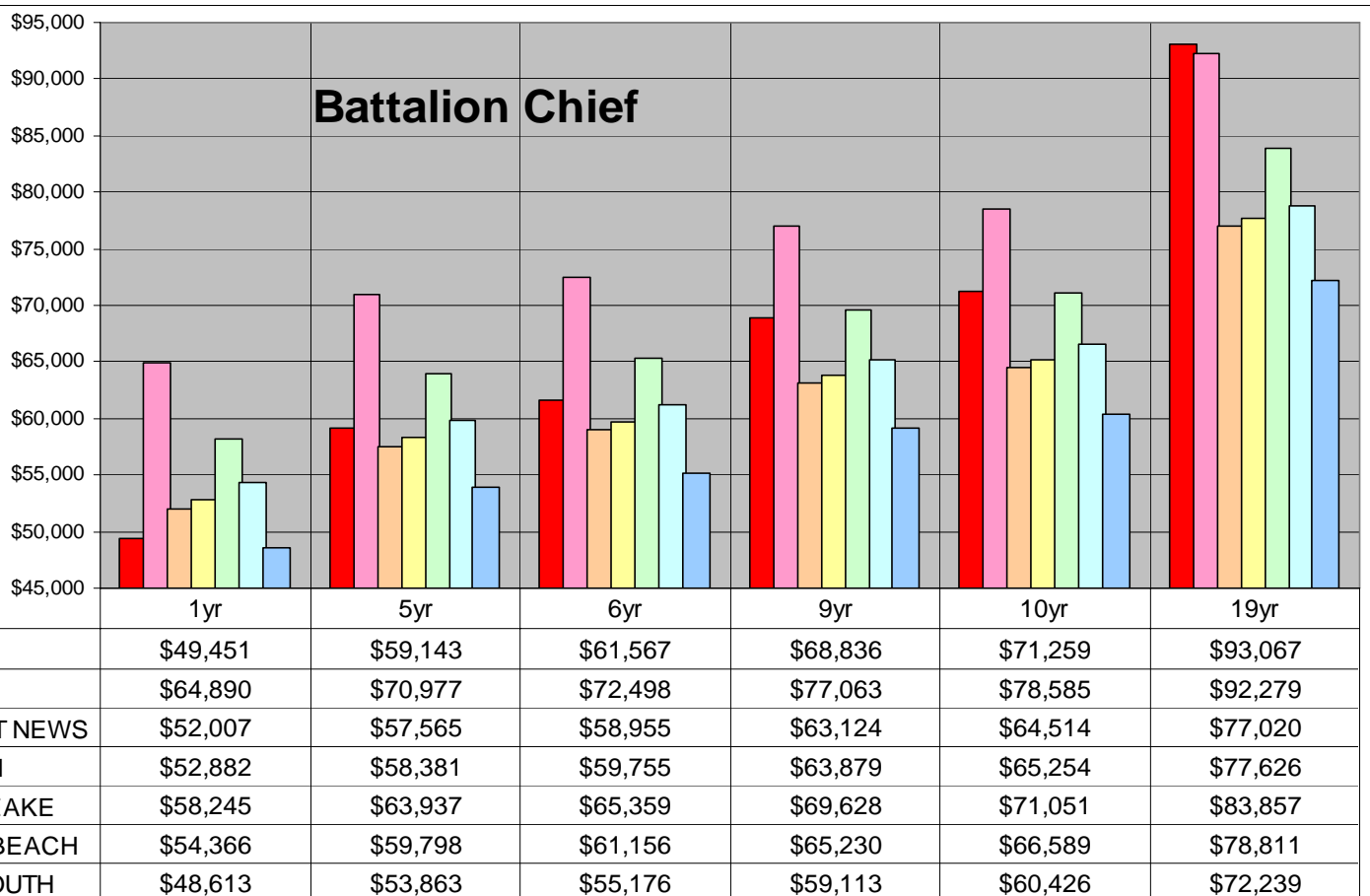


With the rank of battalion chief the SDFR begins to demonstrate a minimum rise in comparable worth. Although not the lowest in salary ranking, SDFR’s salary for battalion chiefs ranks second to the municipality paying its battalion chiefs the lowest amount in Hampton Roads. Despite this, SDFR’s battalion chiefs’ maximum salary is the lowest in comparison to referent others, thus driving down the midpoint salary that each employee’s raise is multiplied by (see graph below).

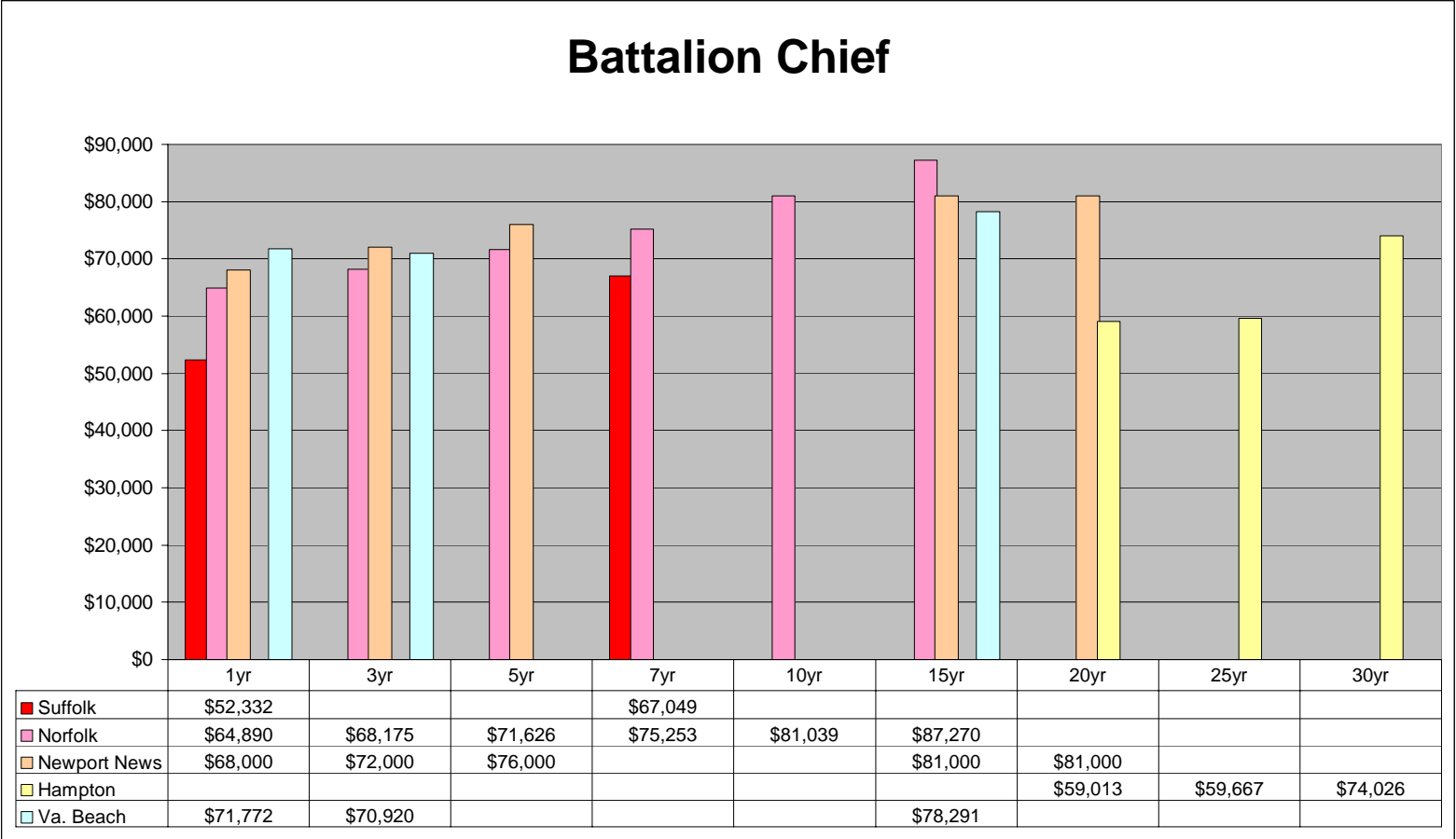


Aside from Suffolk and Portsmouth, if all the other cities continue to give the same pay-raise to their battalion chiefs, they would continue to earn more each year, thus steadily increasing the salary gap between their referent others. Although the city of Portsmouth starts their battalion chiefs at a lower salary, they do have a higher maximum and midpoint salary, thus increasing their rate of salary advances each budget year leading to Portsmouth’s battalion chiefs eventually surpassing SDFR’s battalion chiefs in salary.

Hypothetically, if the City of Suffolk gave its employees a 4% raise and all the other localities only gave a 2% raise, it will take a SDFR battalion chief five years to match the earnings of a battalion chief in Hampton, six years to match the earnings of a Newport News battalion chief, nine years to match the earnings of a Virginia Beach battalion chief, and ten years to match the earnings of a Chesapeake battalion chief. Before a SDFR battalion chief can to match the earnings of their referent other in Norfolk, they would top out at the maximum salary for their pay grade. The graph below shows how long it will take for a battalion chief in Suffolk to match the earnings of all the other battalion chiefs in Tidewater.

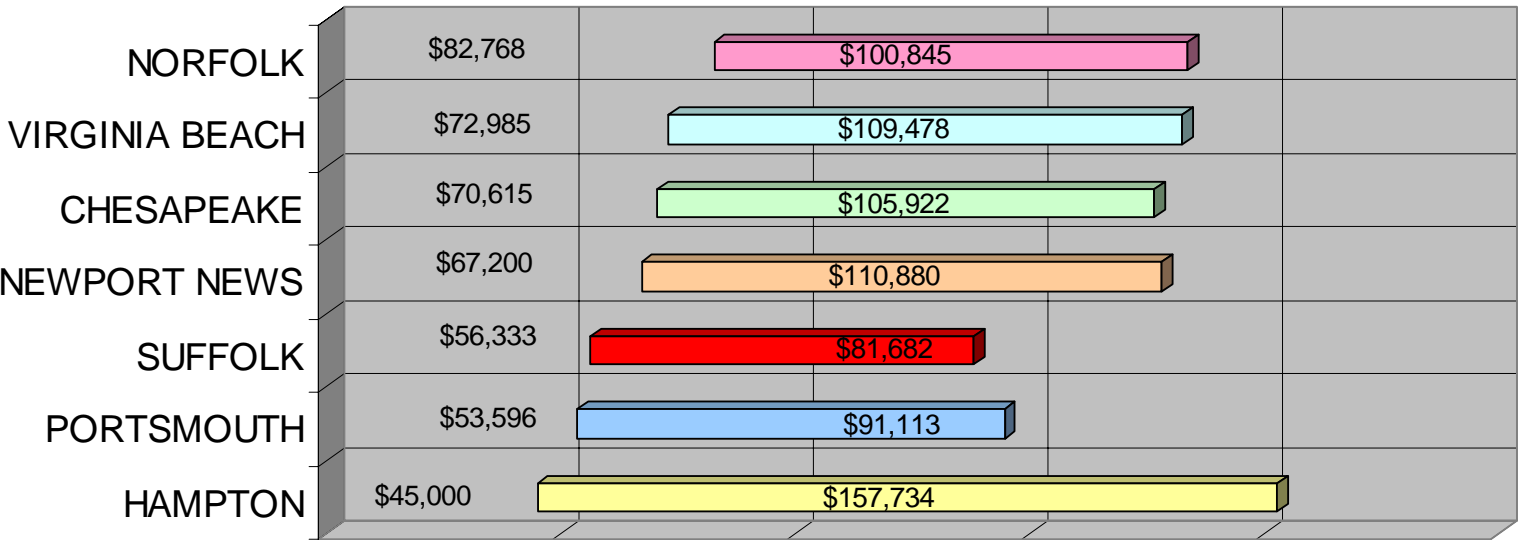


The graph below shows how much a battalion chief makes per city with the same number of years in rank. It compares SDFR battalion chiefs to their referent others in other jurisdictions.



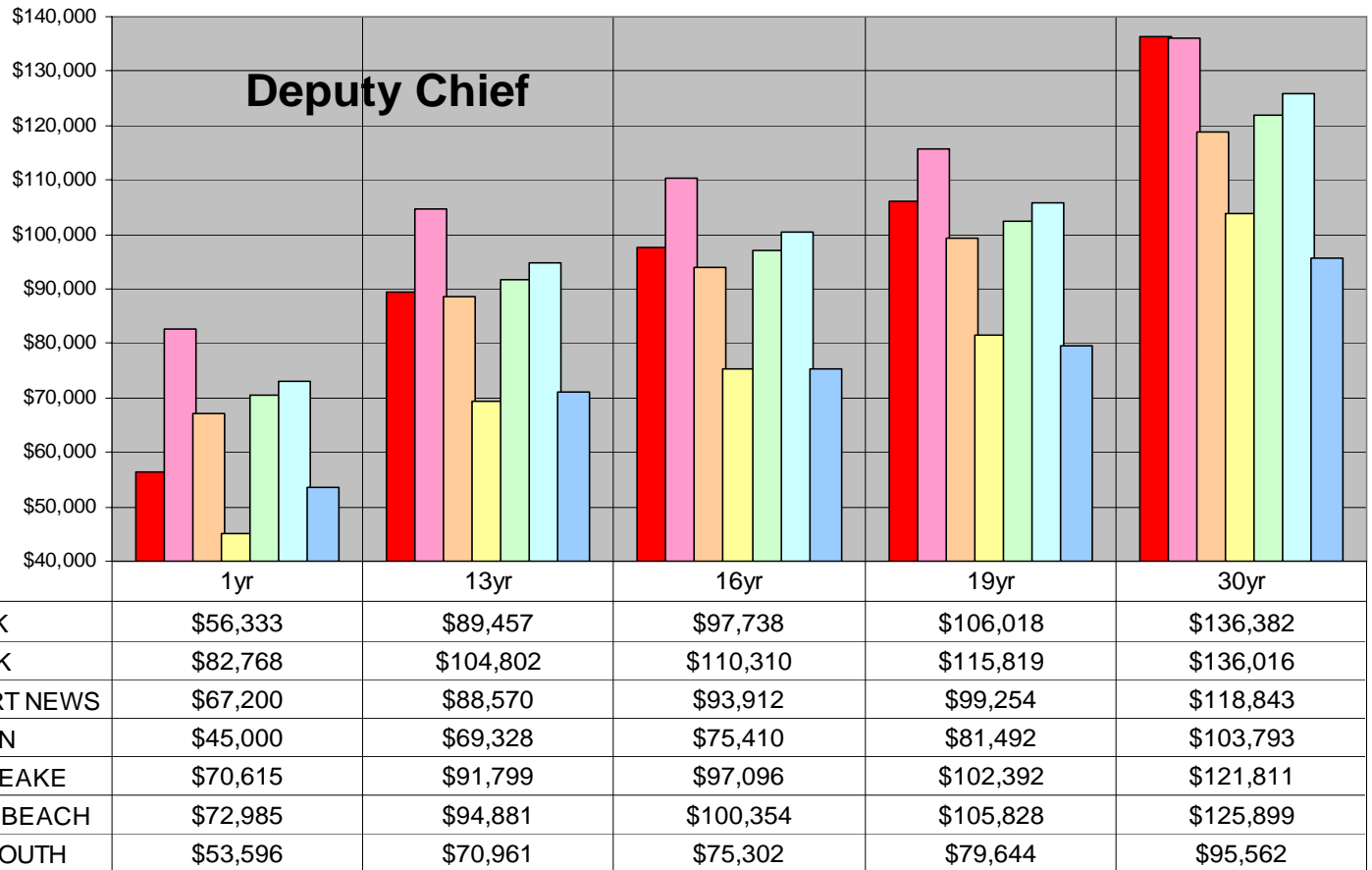
The graph below shows that SDFR demonstrates a steady salary increase, thus paying their employees fair comparable worth, but still falls short of the local average earnings.

Deputy Chief Pay Grade Comparison

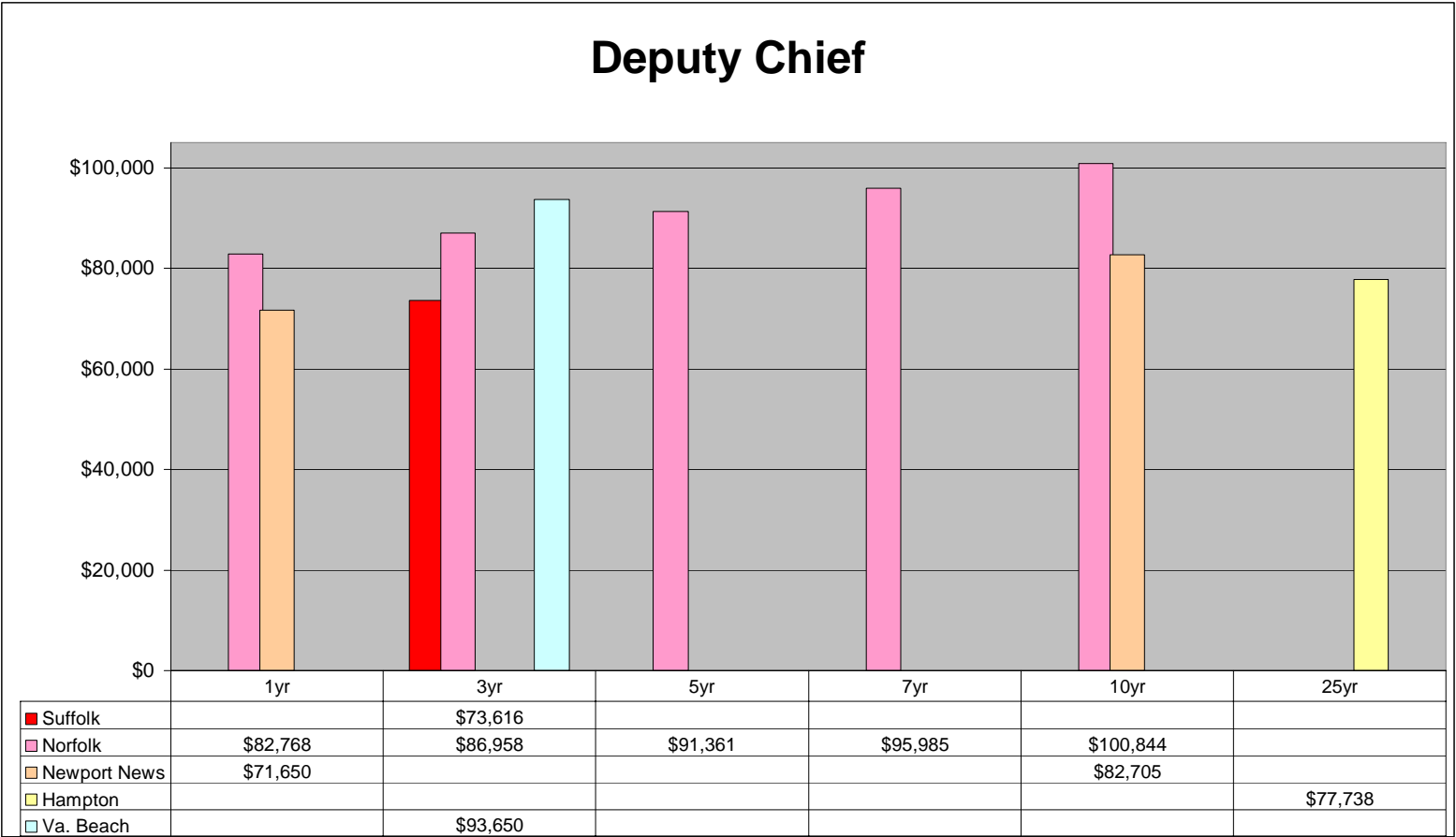


Aside from Suffolk, Portsmouth, and Hampton; if all the other cities continue to give the same pay-raise to their deputy chiefs, they would continue to earn more each year, thus steadily increasing the salary gap between their referent others. Although the cities of Portsmouth and Hampton start their deputy chiefs at a lower salary, they do have a higher maximum and midpoint salary, thus increasing their rate of salary advances each budget year leading to all referent others eventually surpassing SDFR’s deputy chiefs in salary. Before a SDFR deputy chief can match the earnings of a deputy chief in Norfolk, Newport News, Chesapeake, or Virginia Beach they would top out at the maximum salary for their pay grade.

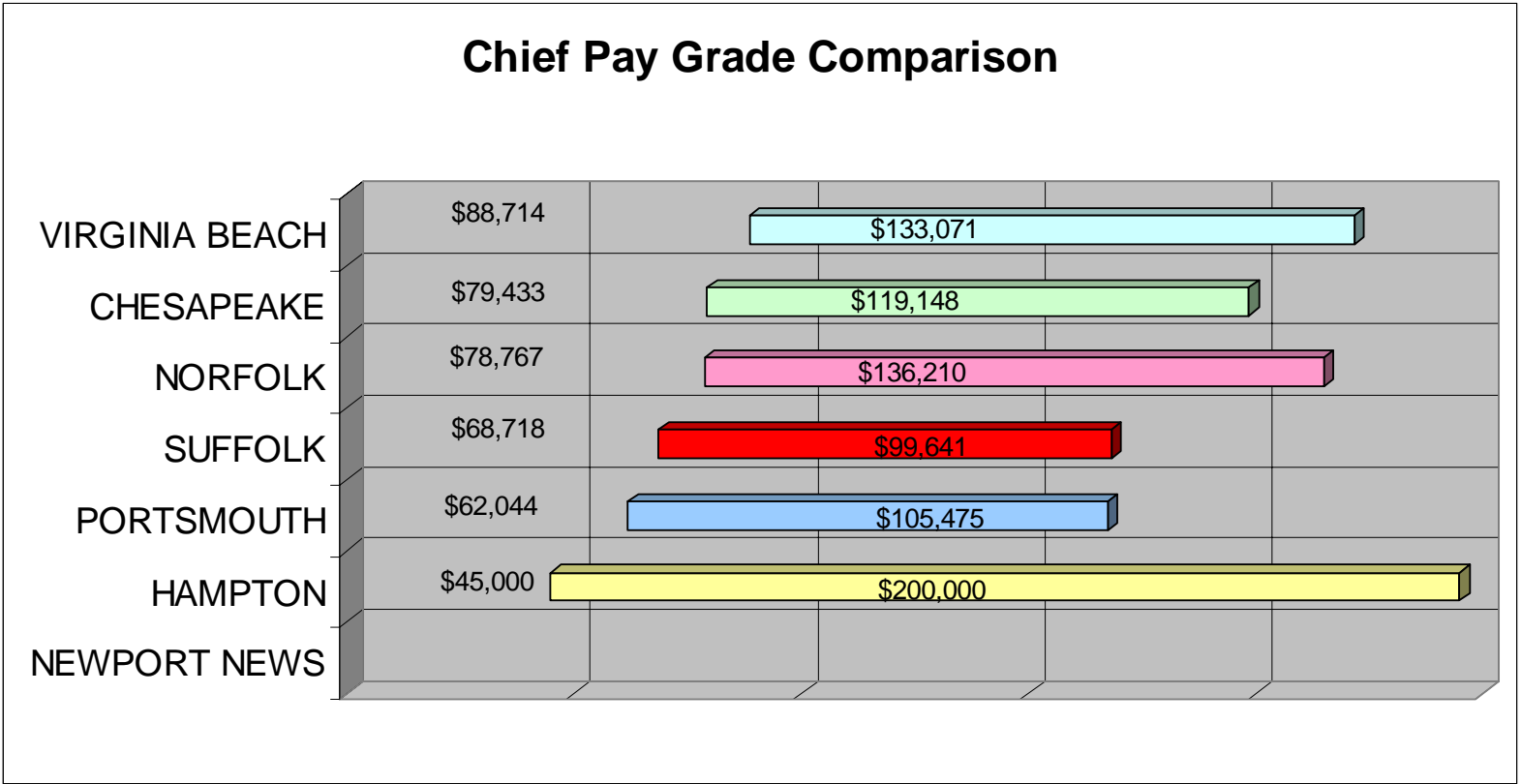
The graph below shows how long it will take for a deputy chief in Suffolk to match the earnings of all the other deputy chiefs in Tidewater if they could surpass the maximum salary for their pay grade.



The graph below shows the salaries deputy chiefs earn per city with the same number of years in rank and compares the salary of SDFR deputy chiefs to their referent others in other jurisdictions.

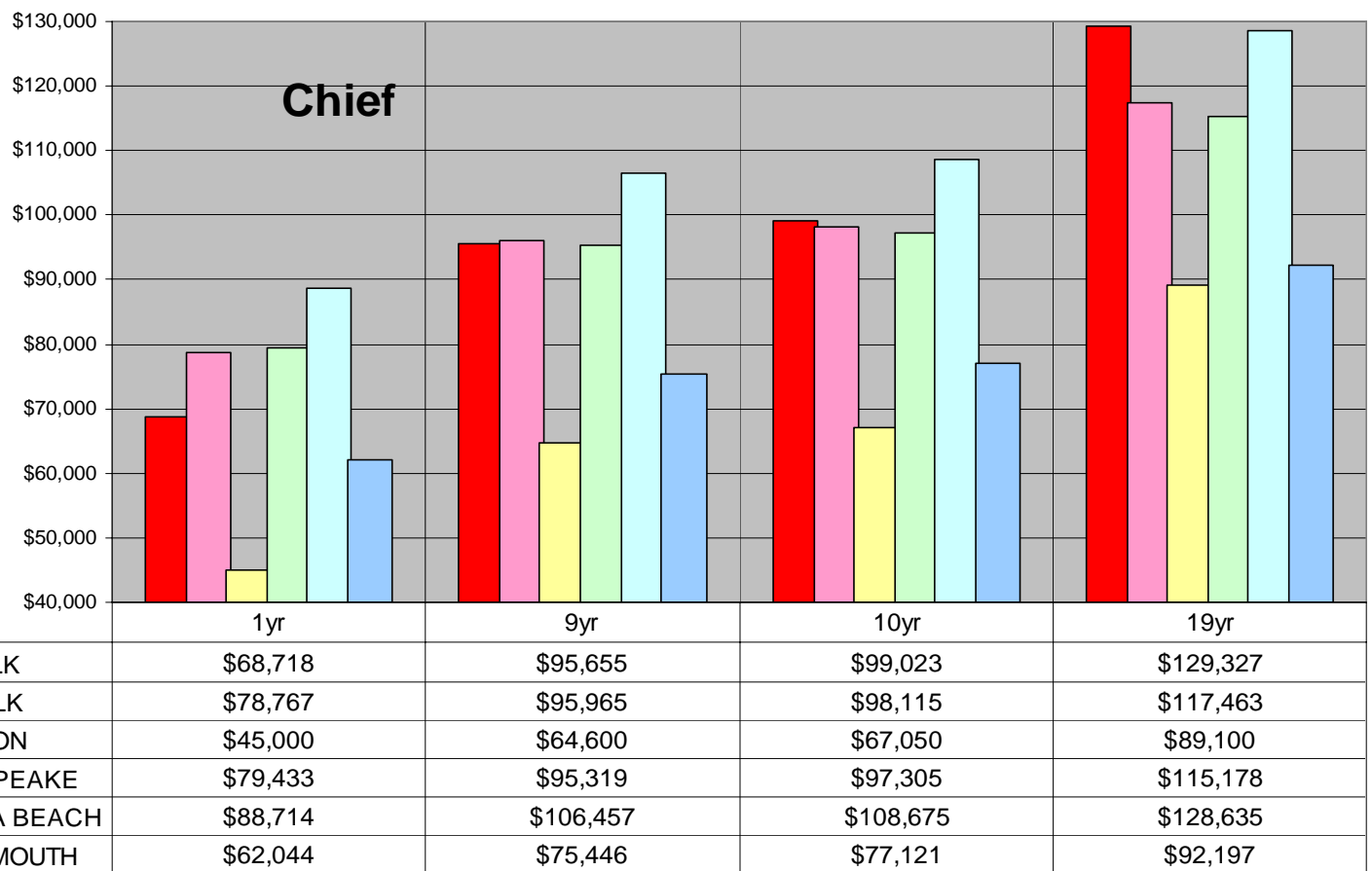


SDFR starts their chief with an average salary comparable to that of the other jurisdictions; however, like all the other remaining ranks, the position continues to have the lowest maximum and midpoint salaries (see the graph below).

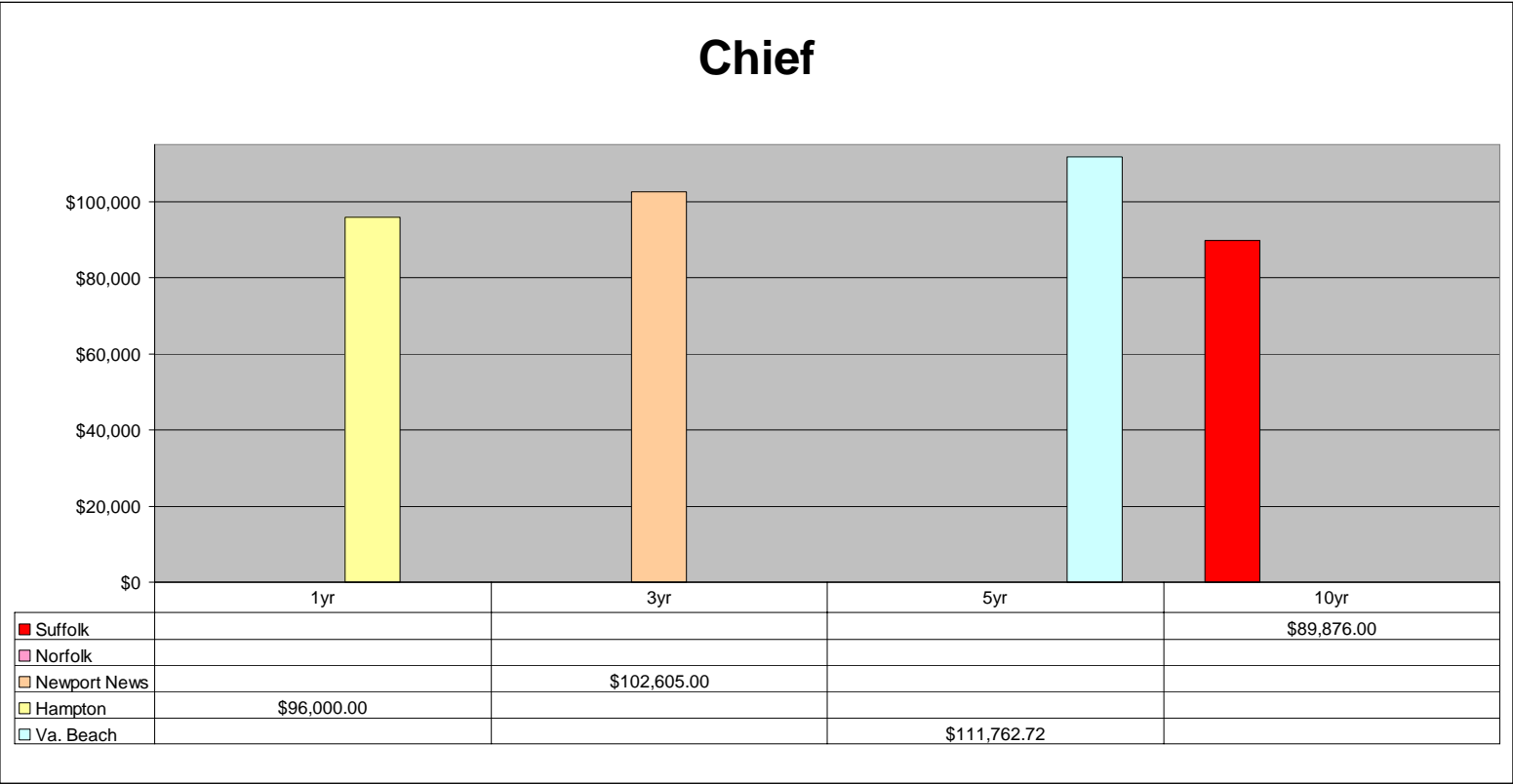


Chiefs in Portsmouth, Hampton, and Newport News already make less than the SDFR Chief. However, all other city fire chiefs have higher maximum midpoint salaries. Therefore, if all the cities got the same pay raise percentage, those fire chiefs in other cities would gradually be earning more each year than the SDFR Chief. (Note: Newport News did not provide a salary structure for their Fire Chief as it is an Executive Level position and the City Manager determines the annual raise.)

Hypothetically, if the City of Suffolk gave its employees a 4% raise and all the other localities only gave a 2% raise, it will take the SDFR's Fire Chief nine years to match the earnings of the Fire Chief of Chesapeake and ten years to match the earning of Norfolk's Fire Chief. Before a Suffolk Fire Chief can catch up to the Virginia Beach Fire Chief, he would top out at the maximum salary for his pay grade. The graph below shows how long it will take the Fire Chief in Suffolk to match the earnings of all the other Fire Chiefs in Tidewater.



The graph below shows how much the Fire Chief earns per city with the same number of years in rank and compares the SDFR Fire Chief’s salary to that of his referent others in other jurisdictions.



(Note: Norfolk did not provide the Fire Chief’s salary; instead only the pay grade, including the minimum and maximum salary were provided.)

The data following answers the second research question:

- How does the existing compression problem result in supervisors earning less than their subordinates?

The table below indicates that there are subordinates earning substantially more than their supervisors because of longevity, not including overtime. When overtime is factored into total earnings, it becomes probable that those subordinates who earn moderately less than their supervisor will exceed their supervisor in pay. This results in a salary compression amongst the ranks. The last column shows which ranks are eligible for overtime.

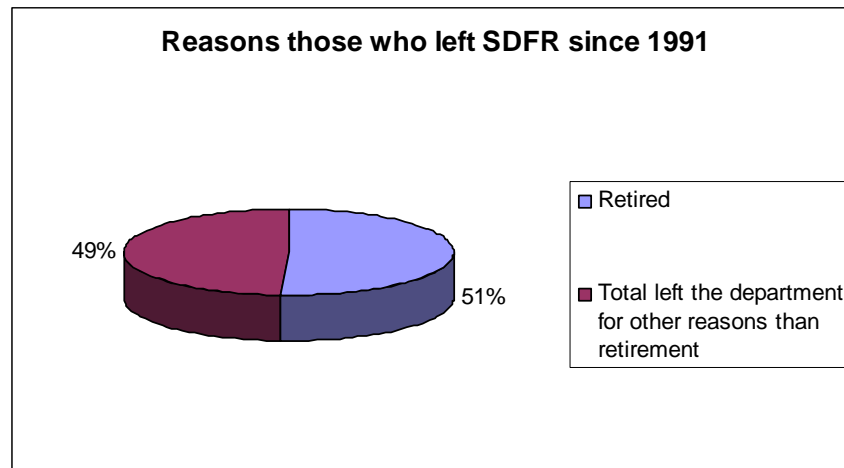
	1yr	3yr	5yr	7yr	10yr	15yr	19yr	24yr	30yr	Eligible for overtime?
CITY of: Suffolk										
Chief (1)					\$89,876					NO
Deputy Chief (1)		\$73,616								NO
Battalion Chief (6)	\$52,332			\$67,049						NO
Captain (13)	\$46,239	\$49,134			\$56,110					YES
Lieutenant (18)	\$39,504	\$42,139	\$45,213							YES
Firefighter/Medic 2 (4)			\$40,776							YES
Firefighter/Medic 1 (12)	\$34,312	\$37,407								YES
Firefighter 2 (61)			\$35,510	\$36,491	\$38,413	\$41,492	\$42,424	\$45,365	\$45,762	YES
Firefighter 1/Recruit (62)	\$30,183	\$32,216								YES

(Note: The number in parenthesis reflects the number of employees holding that rank in the SDFR.)

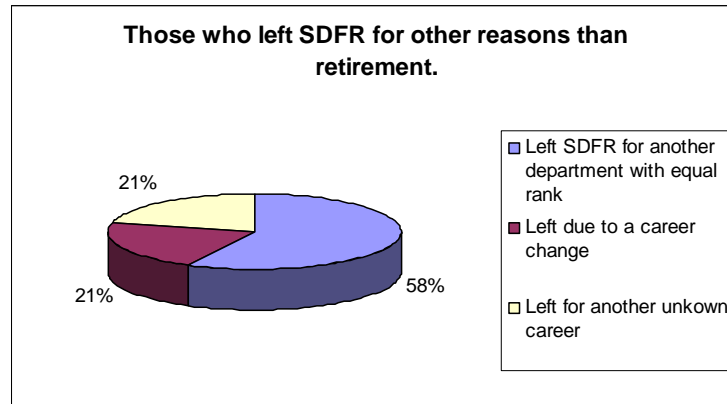
Answers to the following survey questions validated the research assumption that salary rates play a key role in employees' decisions to resign from the SDFR.

- What part of the compensation package most impacts an employee's decision to leave SDFR?
- What other benefits should SDFR compare to other jurisdictions and improve upon to attain and retain employees?

Results from the surveyed sample population indicated that employees who left the SDFR for a similar position in the same career field joined a local department with proximity to the City of Suffolk. Only on rare occasions did an employee leave SDFR for a similar position outside the local area such as a locale more than 100 miles away or out of state. Since 1991, 67 employees have left SDFR. Of those 67, 34 left for retirement (see graph below). This includes full retirement, partial retirement, retirement on disability, etc.

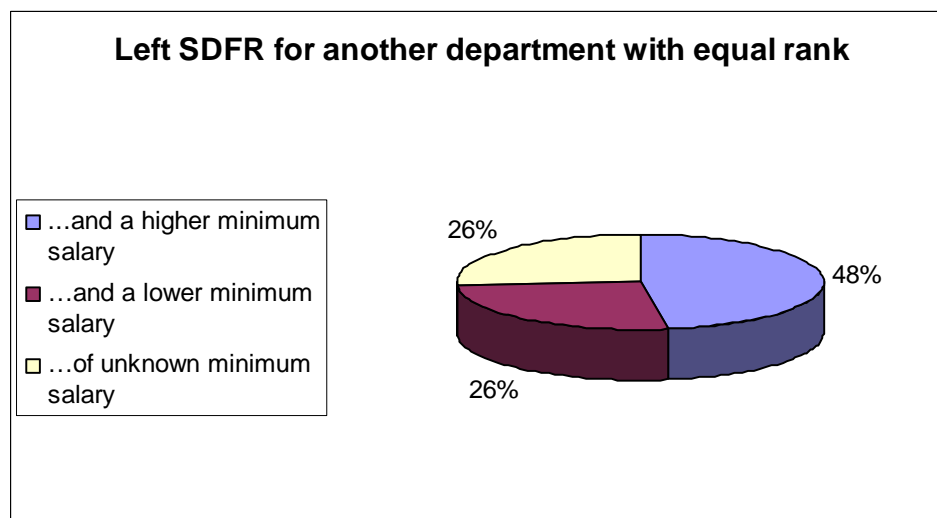


The remaining 33 employees left for reasons other than retirement (see graph below). They include 19 who took a similar job elsewhere, 7 who made a career change, and 7 who left for reasons unknown.



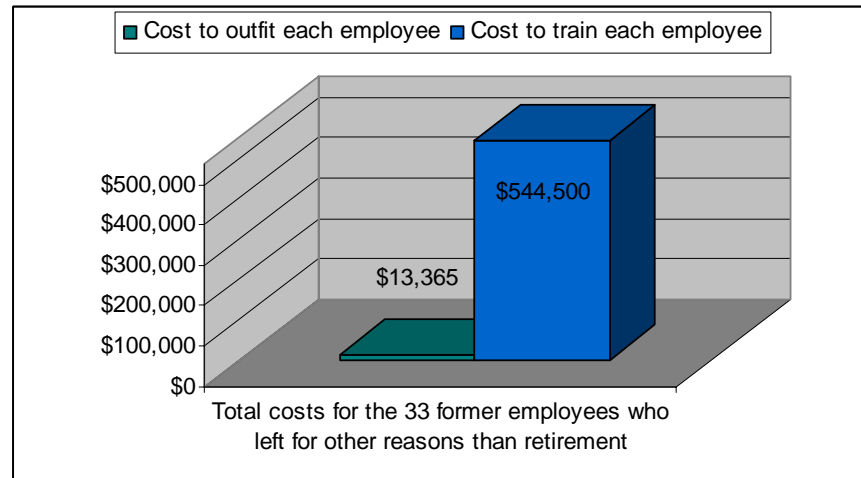
Of the 19 employees who left SDFR to join another department at a position equal to what they left at SDFR, 9 left to take a job that paid higher wages, 5 left to take a job that paid lower wages, and the remaining 5 left to take a job for wages unknown (see the graph below).

Of the 19 employees who made a lateral move to another city's department, 13 were surveyed. The remaining 6 were unreachable or had resigned from the job for a different career

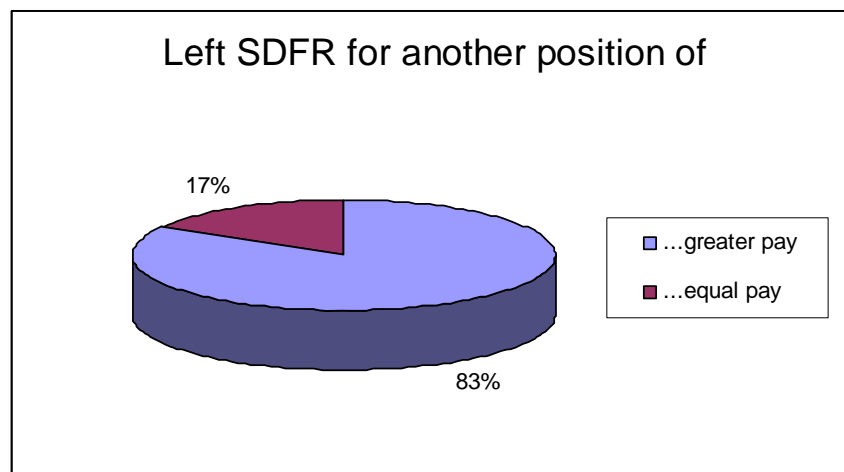


field. Of the 13 former employees who were surveyed, only 6 responded. The average number of years of service the six respondents had with the SDFR was 2.6. Results of the surveys

confirm that 5 employees left SDFR for another position that offered greater pay; one employee took a position of equal pay. The resignations of these employees equal a financial loss to the SDFR of \$557,865 incurred for the cost of training and equipment (see graph below).

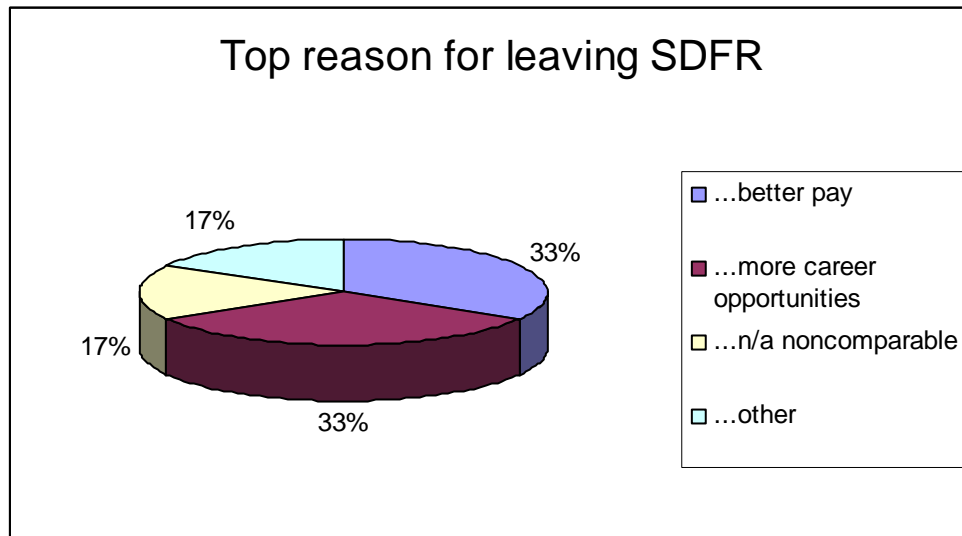


When asked to rank five potential motivating factors for leaving SDFR with the option to add another factor, 2 respondents listed better pay as the top reason for resigning (see graph below).

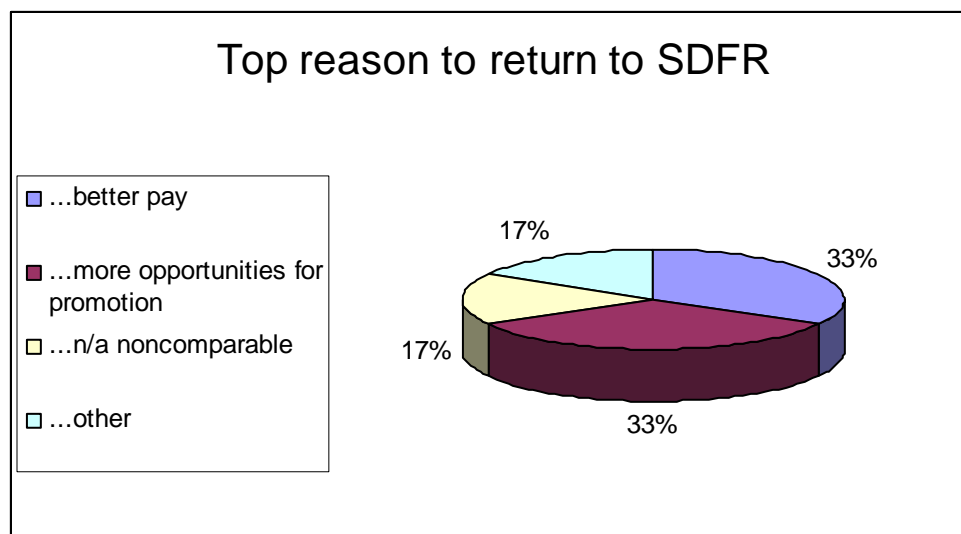


Two others named a desire for more career opportunities such as specialized teams and training as their top reason for resigning from SDFR (see graph below). The remaining 2 listed

identified “other” as a reason for leaving SDFR. One respondent reported that because she and her spouse both worked for SDFR, they felt it was best that one of them left. The remaining respondent indicated that neither factor applied.



When asked to rank five potential motivating factors for returning to SDFR with the option to add another factor, 2 listed better pay as the top incentive (see graph below). Two others chose more opportunities for promotion. The respondent married to another SDFR employee reported that she would not return unless her spouse resigned his service. The last respondent indicated that neither factor applied.



Discussion

The results of the external survey indicate that SDFR pays its firefighters and medics a fair salary. However, for those seeking advancement and promotion to lieutenant and above, salaries and comparable worth begin to diminish drastically compared to their referent others in neighboring jurisdictions. These findings are also mirrored in the internal study comparing employees' salaries and tenure within rank in SDFR. Moreover, results of this study showed that some officers are supervising subordinates who earn, or could potentially earn, substantially more in pay than them, a problem known as "salary compression". To achieve internal consistency, the SDFR's employees must believe that all workers are being paid what they are "worth" (GGI, 2000) compared to their referent other within and outside the organization.

After establishing the levels of compensation for fire department employees in the local jurisdiction, the SDFR could identify its chief competitors in recruitment. The next step for SDFR is to determine how competitive it wants, or can afford, to be. Specifically, it must set a pay policy stipulating how well it will pay its employees relative to the market (GGI, 2000). SDFR will achieve external competitiveness when employees perceive that their pay is fair in relation to what counterparts in other organizations earn.

The most effective way to attract qualified employees without overspending is to offer competitive salaries based on the local market. Well-designed salary survey systems are a great tool to help achieve this (Smith, 2002). If SDFR continues to pay below average salaries over the course of an employee's career, it will continue to lose the highly trained, seasoned employees it needs for succession planning while failing to attract any new recruits. When determining fire service salaries, Suffolk city administrators must be aware that low salaries will only attract trainees (Smith, 2002). However, if compensation rates in Suffolk are too high,

leading to high recruitment rates of qualified personnel, city administration would also have to squander resources that could be used elsewhere for achieving the mission of the department (Smith, 2002).

City administration must achieve a balance between these two extremes by setting a pay range that specifies the minimum and maximum pay rates for all jobs within a grade. By establishing pay ranges, SDFR helps set the market rate at the midpoint of the range, thus enabling SDFR employees to be paid their comparable worth to achieve external consistency (GGI, 2000). Therefore, in establishing its employees' salaries, the City of Suffolk should choose an average or median compensation level (Smith, 2002).

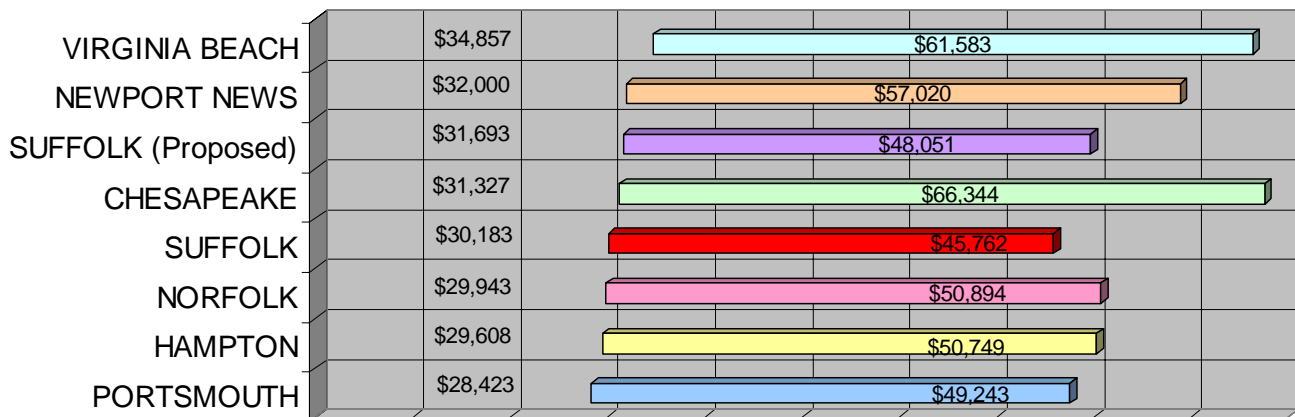
Most people think of compensation in terms of salary alone, but the term refers to more than that (GGI, 2000). Pay alone is not a sufficient incentive to attract, retain and motivate good employees (Straughn, 2005). Surveys and interviews conducted with SDFR former employees for this research showed that salary was not the only factor motivating them to leave SDFR. According to Brown and Associates, "more money" is the top priority in a list of 11 job improvements for emergency responders (Brown et al., 2003). Rewarding staff with money might help a department recruit new staff, but you better see what else you can throw in to sweeten the deal once the effect of more money wears off (Browett, 2004). In addition to an increase in salary, it is the quality of the work itself and the relationship with co-workers that draws employees to the best employers, keeping them there performing at greatest efficiency (Straughn, 2005). A solution to retention problems is to build a new workforce loyalty focused on a reciprocal understanding and meeting of needs (Sinkler, 2001). In every workplace both the employer and the workforce have needs and requirements. If neither the employer, nor the employees understand each others' needs and requirements, or if they are unable or unwilling to

meet them, it will be impossible to build a sustainable, reciprocal relationship with trust (Sinkler, 2001)

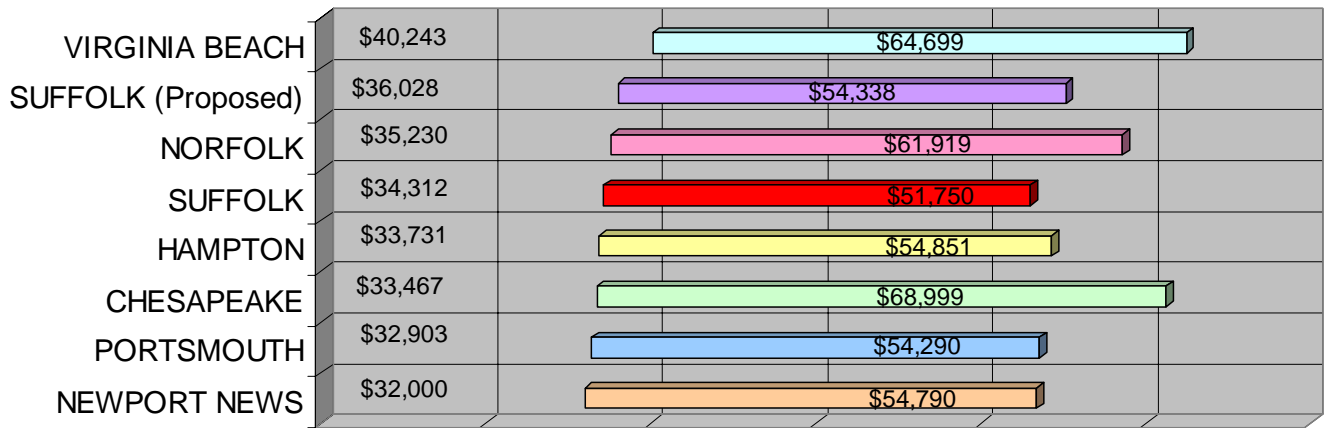
Recommendations

The recommendations resulting from this research focus on increasing the SDFR's competitiveness in the Hampton Roads area to solve its problems with recruitment and retention. A proposed 5% pay increase for each rank within SDFR would make the department more competitive with other Tidewater agencies. This salary increase will set SDFR apart from the lowest paid departments without setting the pay too high, resulting in the City of Suffolk squandering any financial resources. The following two graphs show the proposed recommendation for firefighters and firefighter/medics.

Firefighter Pay Grade Comparison with Proposed Recommendation

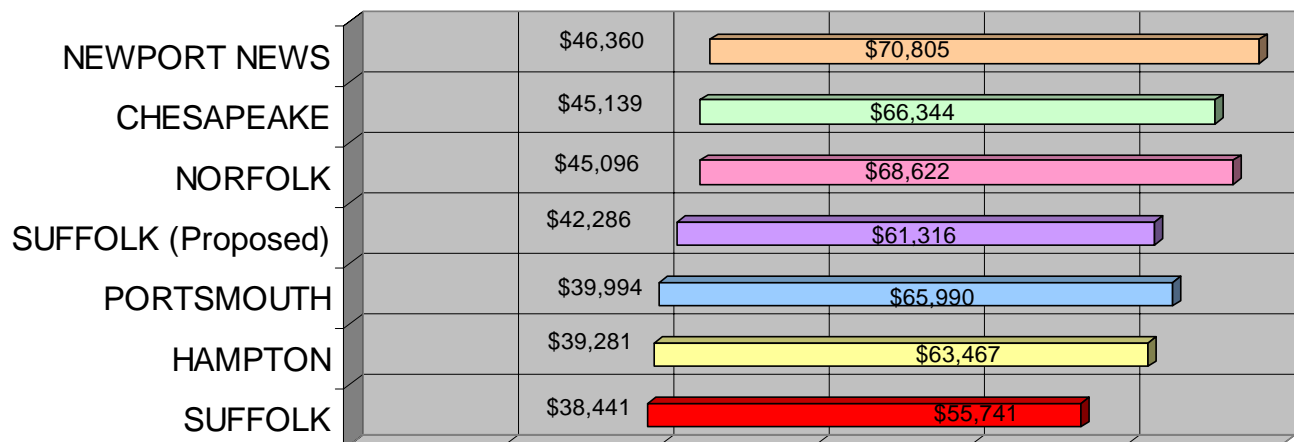


Firefighter/Medic Pay Grade Comparison with Proposed Recommendation

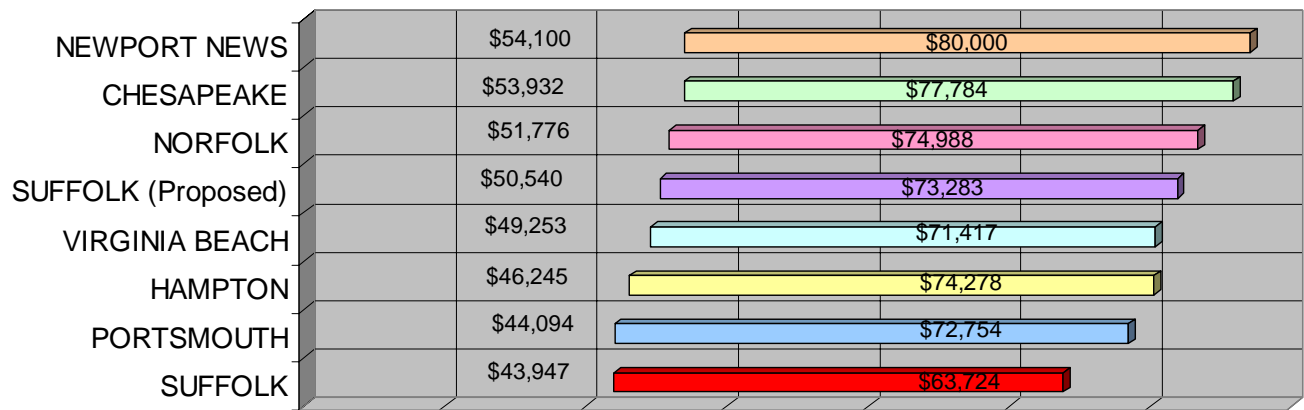


To alleviate salary compression amongst the ranks and to achieve external competitiveness with their referent others in other agencies, each supervisor's salary should be increased by an additional 5% per rank above firefighter up through battalion chief. With this incremental increase, for example, a lieutenant will receive an additional 5% and a captain will receive an additional 10% increase in earnings.

Lieutenant Pay Grade Comparison with Proposed Recommendation

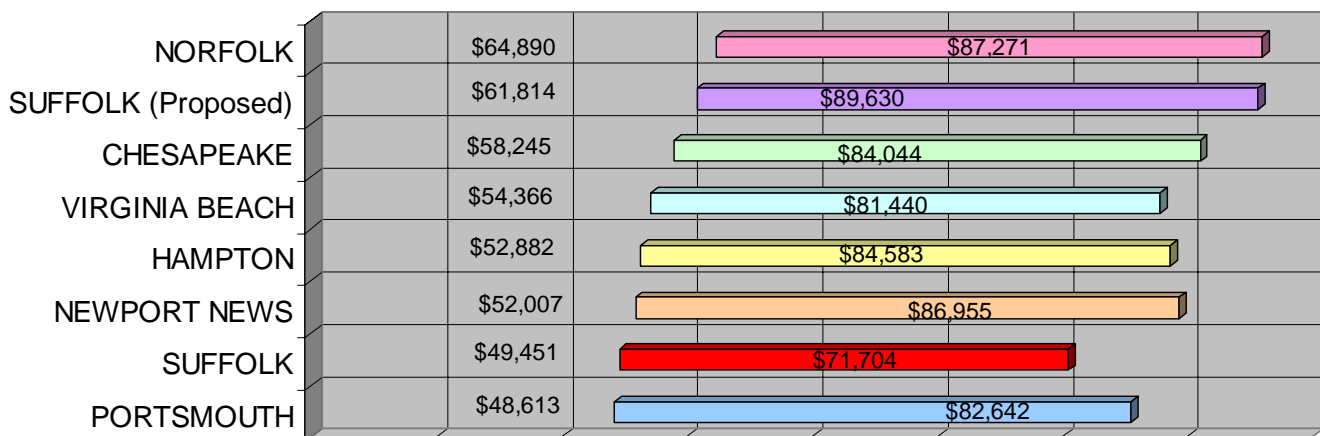


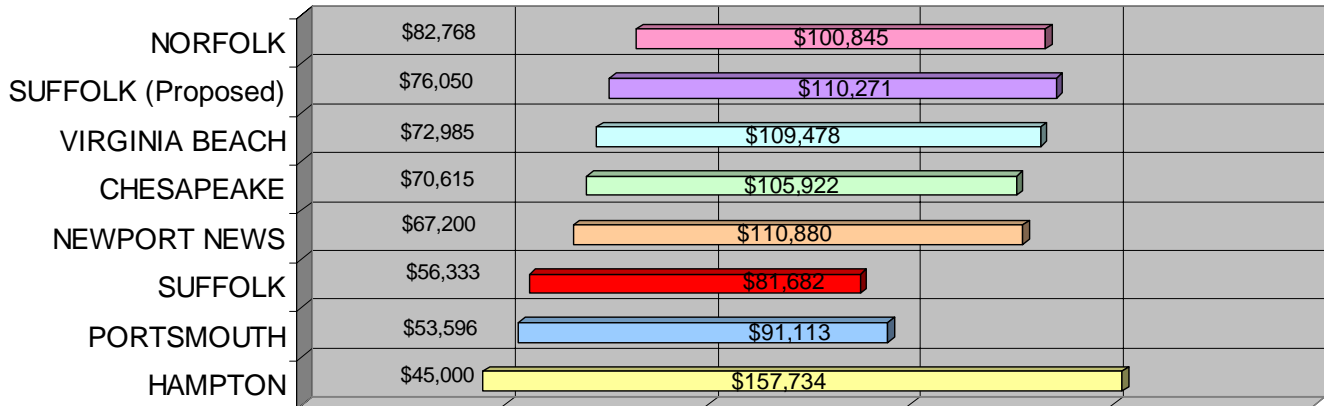
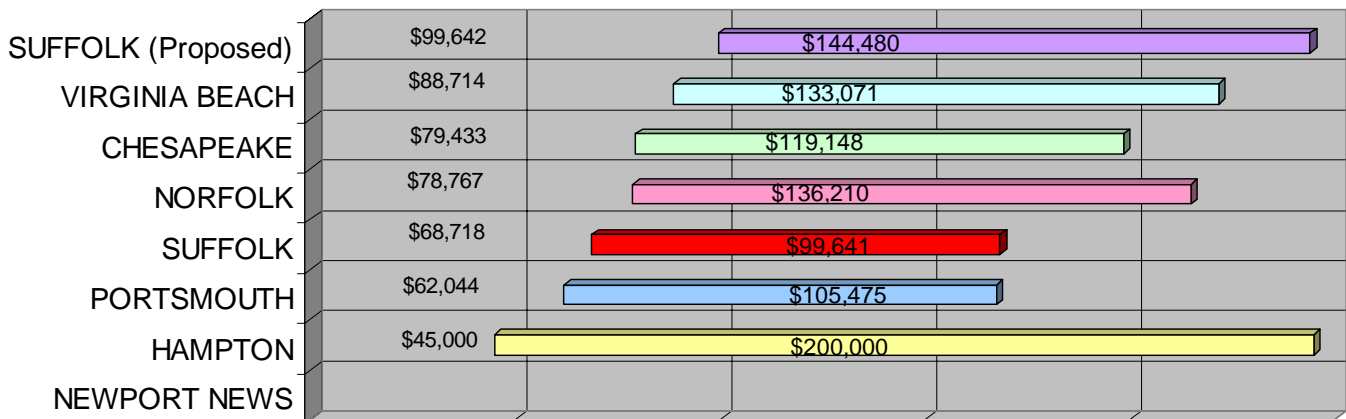
Captain Pay Grade Comparison with Proposed Recommendation



Those ranks above captain should receive a 10% salary increase or become eligible to receive overtime pay. With this incremental salary increase, a battalion chief will receive an additional 20%, a deputy chief will receive an additional 30%, and the Chief will receive an additional 40%. Such measures will achieve internal consistency by ensuring no supervisor earns less than their subordinate, particularly those who are currently ineligible for overtime. The following three graphs illustrate the results of the proposed recommendations for those affected ranks.

Battalion Chief Pay Grade Comparison with Proposed Recommendation



Deputy Chief Pay Grade Comparison with**Chief Pay Grade Comparison with Proposed Recommendation**

In addition to setting salaries, SDFR must consider the value of comprehensive compensation when achieving external competitiveness (Smith, 2002). The goal of any compensation and benefits package is to pay enough to attract and retain qualified people without “giving away the farm” in the process. The real art to this process is determining where to set the compensation level so that it is high enough to attract and retain good personnel

(Smith, 2002). If you set levels too low, your best employees will go to other agencies where compensation levels are significantly better, leaving you with mediocre employees and the inability to attract anything but mediocre employees (Smith, 2002).

For pay rates to be internally consistent, an organization must first determine the overall importance or worth of each job. A job's worth is typically evaluated based on "informed judgments" regarding such things as the amount of skill and effort required to perform the job, the difficulty of the job, and the amount of responsibility assumed by the job-holder. The systematic process for determining the worth of a job is called a "job evaluation" (GGI, 2000). Therefore, the first step towards restructuring the SDFR's pay grades is to conduct a thorough evaluation of each position within the department. This process would begin with establishing a Job Evaluation Committee to undertake these evaluations (GGI, 2000). The major problem with job evaluation ratings is that they are subjective and can cause inaccurate and unreliable ratings. To minimize subjectivity, the rating scales used to evaluate positions must be clearly defined in a set of printed instructions, and evaluators should be thoroughly trained in the application of them. The evaluators should be provided with complete, accurate, and up-to-date job descriptions (GGI, 2000).

When the Compensation Study is conducted by a consulting firm, it should examine the compensation package as a whole, not just salary. The study must include a review of the retirement system, health care and life insurance, annual/sick/holiday/funeral/special leave time, retirement investment plan, education incentives/bonuses, tuition reimbursement, special pay and allowances, and any other fringe benefits.

In addition to a Compensation Study, public safety officers pay grades should be separated from the general city employee pay scale. Currently a firefighter, a sanitation worker,

and Type I Clericalist are listed in the same pay grade. In other words, they all start at the same salary and top out the same level. However, the latter two employees do not work in a high risk position like the public safety employee. To achieve equity in employees' compensation, the organization must establish a range of pay for each grade; it must then place each employee within that range based on his or her contribution to the organization (GGI, 2000).

For SDFR to build a workforce of loyal employees, it must focus on a reciprocal understanding and meeting of needs between employee and employer (Sinkler, 2001). To determine those needs, an internal survey of employee perceptions should be completed. The survey should measure SDFR's employees' perceptions of their own worth, their expectations of the department as their employer and whether SDFR is meeting those expectations. Once employee expectations are identified, SDFR must work to mitigate the glaring discrepancies between what employees need to remain satisfied in their positions and what they are currently receiving. This reciprocal relationship is the key to retaining a quality workforce.

Summary of Recommendations for Suffolk Department of Fire and Rescue

- A 5% pay increase for each rank to ensure salaries are competitive with other Tidewater agencies.
- To alleviate salary compression and ensure external competitiveness with their referent others, increase the lieutenants' salary by an additional 5% and the captains' salary by an additional 10%.
- For those ranks ineligible for overtime, salaries should be progressively increased in 10% increments above the recommended salary for a captain. For example, a battalion chief will increase 20%, a deputy chief 30%, and the Department Chief 40%. The alternative to this recommendation would be to pay these ranks overtime to alleviate salary compression.
- Assess future Compensation Studies holistically rather than focusing on salaries.
- Establish a Job Evaluation Committee to devise an evaluation tool that will fairly assess the job scope of a public safety employee's position for purposes of calculating a competitive pay scale.
- Establish clearly defined and written job descriptions for each rank and position that include job responsibilities, candidate requirements, evaluation criteria etc.
- Establish pay grades and pay ranges separate from general city employees for each job description.
- Complete an internal study to measure employee perception of professional worth and job satisfaction.

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APPENDIX A

The following is a list of those items sent in the Pay Study packet to all the Tidewater cities; some items are found on the following pages of this appendix:

- Chief Outlaw's cover letter
- Chief Jolly's cover letter
- 10-question questionnaire
- Fill-in-the-blank worksheet
- Internal report showing breakdown amongst ranks
- Pay grades showing Minimum, Midpoint, and Maximum salary
- Organizational Chart
- Call statistics
- Performance evaluation form

A complete copy of a packet is available upon request.

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400 Market St.
Suffolk, VA. 23434

Suffolk Department of Fire & Rescue

October 6, 2004

[Click **here** and type recipient's address]

Dear Chief:

This past May, our City Council adopted the FY2004-2005 Operating Budget. Included in the budget were funds for a Public Safety Compensation Study by a third party vendor. To precede this project, it is my intention to conduct a local study of the Hampton Roads Fire & Rescue Community. This project will compare each of our departments and hopefully mirror the same product that the third party will produce. If it does not, then hopefully our study will be able to point out their inadequacies.

I have assigned this project to one of my Battalion Chiefs, Charles R. Jolly. I have asked him to review the salaries of each rank for specific service years of each of the Hampton Roads Fire and Rescue Departments. Having completed a thorough internal study, he is ready to collect that same information from your departments. He has put together a 10 question survey to collect the necessary data to make this report as comprehensive as possible. I would appreciate it if you take the time to answer each question thoroughly and return it as soon as possible.

Your prompt attention is greatly appreciated. Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions. Once the study has been completed, I would be happy to provide copies to those who are interested.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

M. R. Outlaw
Chief

.....

400 Market St.
Suffolk, VA. 23434

Suffolk Department of Fire & Rescue

October 6, 2004

[Click **here** and type recipient's address]

Dear Chief:

I have been directed by Chief M. R. Outlaw to conduct a Pay Study of our local Fire/Rescue employees. I have completed an internal study showing a comparison between and amongst ranks. The study shows some of the compression that I am sure we are all experiencing. Another part of my task is to show how our department compares with all the cities in Tidewater. Therefore, I have put together this packet for you and am asking for your help.

This packet includes several items; however the two most important is the 10 question survey and the fill-in-the-blank portion. The fill-in-the-blank sheet provides an opportunity for you and/or your designee to fill in the areas that your department employs. For instance, if you have multiple Assistant Chiefs, could you provide the salary for just one and a total number of employees for that rank and if they are eligible for overtime or not. A self-addressed stamp envelope is provided for return of the packet as soon as possible. To speed this process I will be available to answer any questions that should surface. I am willing to meet with you or your designee to put together the information I need to complete this study.

The remaining information is for you in the event you are conducting a pay study now or in the near future. Thank you for your time and I look forward to working with you in the future.

Respectfully,

C. R. Jolly
Battalion Chief

1. Could you provide a copy of your organizational chart? (See attach)
2. Could you provide a copy of your 2003 Call Statistics? (See attach)
3. How many are employed with your Fire/Rescue Dept full-time? Part-time?
(See attach)
4. Could you provide job descriptions and job classifications for each Job Title?
Include the salary ranges/structure for each title, including the minimum, mid-point, and maximum salary. (See attach.)
5. What does your promotion process include and how often do you conduct it?
(Check all that apply.)

<input type="checkbox"/> Assessment Center	<input type="checkbox"/> Written test	<input type="checkbox"/> Interview board
<input type="checkbox"/> Psychological test	<input type="checkbox"/> Seniority	<input type="checkbox"/> Elections
<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Leaderless groups
6. What is the pay raise percentage increase for promotions? (*ie. 5% for Firefighter promoted to Master Firefighter, 10% for Master firefighter to Lieutenant, etc...*)
7. What evaluation process does your department use and can you provide a blank copy as an example? Is it different from General Employees?
8. Fill in the blanks on the last attachment. These are not averages; they are the exact base salary of one employee for each category. Please provide the same for one employee per title. (See attach)
9. Who would you suggest as a contact in the event that questions should arise? Preferably someone with Human Resources responsibilities.
10. Has your department done a pay study in the last 5 years? Is yes could you provide a copy?

APPENDIX B

Formula to determine the Midpoint salary:

$$(((Max\ salary - Min\ salary) / 2) + Min\ salary) = Mid\ salary$$

Example: **Max salary** = \$51,750
Min salary = \$34,312
 $((51750 - 34312) / 2) + 34312 = 43031$
 Midpoint Salary of a Firefighter/Medic = \$43,031

Formula to determine the annual raise for Suffolk to catch up with the sister cities throughout Tidewater:

For every year after the first one which starts with the Minimum salary. This is based on the assumption that Suffolk will get 4% pay raises each year.

$$((Mid\ salary * 4\%) + previous\ year\ salary) = Following\ year\ salary$$

Example: **Mid salary** = \$43,031
Previously year salary (4th) = \$39,476
 $((43031 * 4\%) + 39476) = 41197$
 5th year salary of a Suffolk Firefighter/Medic = \$41,197

Formula to determine the annual raise for all other Tidewater cities.

For every year after the first one which starts with the Minimum salary. This is based on the assumption that each city will get 2% pay raises each year.

$$((Mid\ salary * 2\%) + previous\ year\ salary) = Following\ year\ salary$$

APPENDIX C

The following is a legend for each graph throughout the report, showing all the Cities surveyed and their corresponding color.

	SUFFOLK
	SUFFOLK (PROPOSED)
	NORFOLK
	NEWPORT NEWS
	HAMPTON
	CHESAPEAKE
	VIRGINIA BEACH
	PORTSMOUTH

APPENDIX D

These charts show the rate of change as each rank's starting salary in Tidewater increases each year and how long it will take a SDFR employee to catch up with their referent other in another jurisdiction. These increases are based on the average raises from the last 5 years for each municipality.

Firefighter

MUNICIPALITY	AVG. PAY RAISE	1yr	2yr	3yr	4yr	5yr	6yr	10yr
SUFFOLK	4%	\$30,183	\$31,702	\$33,221	\$34,740	\$36,259	\$37,778	\$43,853
NORFOLK	2%	\$29,943	\$30,751	\$31,559	\$32,368	\$33,176	\$33,984	\$37,218
NEWPORT NEWS	2%	\$32,000	\$32,890	\$33,780	\$34,671	\$35,561	\$36,451	\$40,012
HAMPTON	2%	\$29,608	\$30,412	\$31,215	\$32,019	\$32,822	\$33,626	\$36,840
CHESAPEAKE	2%	\$31,327	\$32,304	\$33,280	\$34,257	\$35,234	\$36,211	\$40,117
VIRGINIA BEACH	2%	\$34,857	\$35,821	\$36,786	\$37,750	\$38,715	\$39,679	\$43,537
PORTSMOUTH	2%	\$28,423	\$29,200	\$29,976	\$30,753	\$31,530	\$32,306	\$35,413

Firefighter/Medic

MUNICIPALITY	AVG. PAY RAISE	2yr	3yr	4yr	5yr	6yr	10yr
SUFFOLK	4%	\$34,312	\$36,033	\$37,754	\$39,476	\$41,197	\$49,803
NORFOLK	2%	\$35,230	\$36,201	\$37,173	\$38,144	\$39,116	\$43,973
NEWPORT NEWS	2%	\$34,000	\$34,888	\$35,776	\$36,664	\$37,552	\$41,991
HAMPTON	2%	\$33,731	\$34,617	\$35,503	\$36,388	\$37,274	\$41,703
CHESAPEAKE	2%	\$33,467	\$34,492	\$35,516	\$36,541	\$37,566	\$42,689
VIRGINIA BEACH	2%	\$40,243	\$41,292	\$42,342	\$43,391	\$44,441	\$49,688
PORTSMOUTH	2%	\$32,903	\$33,775	\$34,647	\$35,519	\$36,391	\$40,750

Lieutenant

MUNICIPALITY	AVG. PAY RAISE	1yr	2yr	3yr	10yr	13yr
SUFFOLK	4%	\$38,441	\$40,325	\$42,208	\$55,394	\$61,045
NORFOLK	2%	\$45,096	\$46,233	\$47,370	\$55,331	\$58,742
NEWPORT NEWS	2%	\$46,360	\$47,532	\$48,703	\$56,905	\$60,420
HAMPTON	2%	\$39,281	\$40,308	\$41,336	\$48,528	\$51,611
CHESAPEAKE	2%	\$45,139	\$46,254	\$47,369	\$55,172	\$58,517
PORTSMOUTH	2%	\$39,994	\$41,054	\$42,114	\$49,533	\$52,712

Captain

MUNICIPALITY	AVG. PAY RAISE	1yr	2yr	3yr	7yr	10yr	13yr	14yr
SUFFOLK	4%	\$43,947	\$46,100	\$48,254	\$56,868	\$63,328	\$69,788	\$71,941
NORFOLK	2%	\$51,776	\$53,043	\$54,311	\$59,382	\$63,185	\$66,987	\$68,255
NEWPORT NEWS	2%	\$54,100	\$55,441	\$56,782	\$62,146	\$66,169	\$70,192	\$71,533
HAMPTON	2%	\$46,245	\$47,450	\$48,655	\$53,476	\$57,092	\$60,708	\$61,913
CHESAPEAKE	2%	\$53,932	\$55,249	\$56,566	\$61,835	\$65,786	\$69,738	\$71,055
VIRGINIA BEACH	2%	\$49,253	\$50,460	\$51,666	\$56,251	\$59,144	\$62,037	\$63,244
PORTSMOUTH	2%	\$44,094	\$45,262	\$46,431	\$51,105	\$54,610	\$58,116	\$59,284

Battalion Chief

MUNICIPALITY	AVG. PAY RAISE	1yr	5yr	6yr	9yr	10yr	19yr
SUFFOLK	4%	\$49,451	\$59,143	\$61,567	\$68,836	\$71,259	\$93,067
NORFOLK	2%	\$64,890	\$70,977	\$72,498	\$77,063	\$78,585	\$92,279
NEWPORT NEWS	2%	\$52,007	\$57,565	\$58,955	\$63,124	\$64,514	\$77,020
HAMPTON	2%	\$52,882	\$58,381	\$59,755	\$63,879	\$65,254	\$77,626
CHESAPEAKE	2%	\$58,245	\$63,937	\$65,359	\$69,628	\$71,051	\$83,857
VIRGINIA BEACH	2%	\$54,366	\$59,798	\$61,156	\$65,230	\$66,589	\$78,811
PORTSMOUTH	2%	\$48,613	\$53,863	\$55,176	\$59,113	\$60,426	\$72,239

Deputy Chief

MUNICIPALITY	AVG. PAY RAISE	1yr	13yr	16yr	19yr	30yr
SUFFOLK	4%	\$56,333	\$89,457	\$97,738	\$106,018	\$136,382
NORFOLK	2%	\$82,768	\$104,802	\$110,310	\$115,819	\$136,016
NEWPORT NEWS	2%	\$67,200	\$88,570	\$93,912	\$99,254	\$118,843
HAMPTON	2%	\$45,000	\$69,328	\$75,410	\$81,492	\$103,793
CHESAPEAKE	2%	\$70,615	\$91,799	\$97,096	\$102,392	\$121,811
VIRGINIA BEACH	2%	\$72,985	\$94,881	\$100,354	\$105,828	\$125,899
PORTSMOUTH	2%	\$53,596	\$70,961	\$75,302	\$79,644	\$95,562

Chief

MUNICIPALITY	AVG. PAY RAISE	1yr	9yr	10yr	19yr
SUFFOLK	4%	\$68,718	\$95,655	\$99,023	\$129,327
NORFOLK	2%	\$78,767	\$95,965	\$98,115	\$117,463
NEWPORT NEWS *	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
HAMPTON	2%	\$45,000	\$64,600	\$67,050	\$89,100
CHESAPEAKE	2%	\$79,433	\$95,319	\$97,305	\$115,178
VIRGINIA BEACH	2%	\$88,714	\$106,457	\$108,675	\$128,635
PORTSMOUTH	2%	\$62,044	\$75,446	\$77,121	\$92,197